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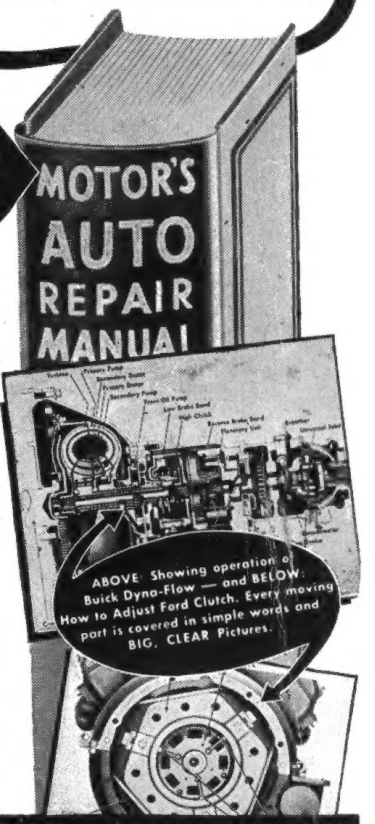


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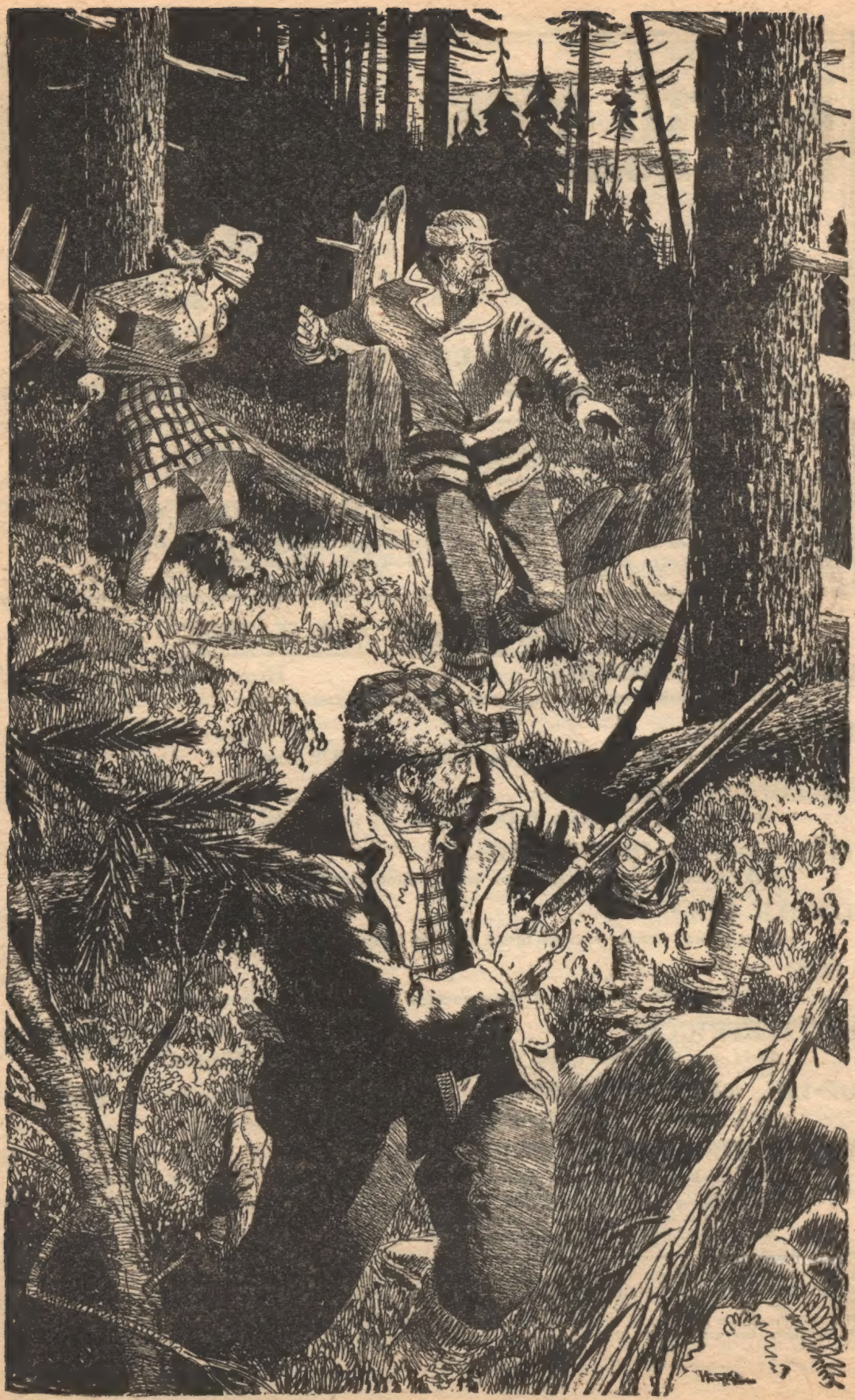

*A Thundering Novel of the Northland*

# *Mistress of the Midnight Sun*

## By DAN CUSHMAN

**With the cunning and fury of a ravenous wolverine this strange daughter of the Borealis guarded the jeweled treasure that lured nine adventurers North to a Devil's jackpot.**

BLADE CROSSEN sat in the wickiup of Kakissa the Yellowknife and watched as three canoes approached on the choppy waters of Spirit Lake.

Kakissa peered over his shoulder and asked, "Mounted police?"

Crossen lifted a finger indicating that one of them was. He looked like an Indian when he did it. He was a stolid man, burned very brown by sun and snowglare. He might have been thirty or thirty-five years old. He was tall, and lean, with the toughness of a babiche thong.

"Nine police," Kakissa said, counting them. "Munetoowa, who ever heard of nine police?"

Blade Crossen laughed and said, "Maybe they came to take me in."

"Eh-meyo! For no man do they need nine police."

Crossen reached for his Winchester, worked the lever enough to see the brassy shine of a cartridge in the chamber, and laid it across his thighs. Merely habit. He had no idea of needing it.

The canoes tied up one after another, and the men headed up through spotty timber toward the trading post. Only one of them was in police uniform. He was short and quick-stepping. Beside him was a rangy, big-boned man with blond hair.

A breed hurried from the post and ran

the Union Jack up on the spruce pole, and when it was snapping in the breeze off the lake, Buchanan walked down from the company building to meet them.

Buchanan had changed to his white shirt and best plaid mackinaw pants. When a hundred yards separated them he stopped and cried out a greeting, but Crossen knew he wasn't so pleased as he tried to sound. The arrival of white men, even a couple of white men, always irked him. Never to Crossen's knowledge had so many as nine come in one day, or even one season, to that remote post at Spirit Lake.

Buchanan shook hands, first with the policeman, then with the big blond man. He turned, walking between them, and took them inside. They'd all have one out of the company bottle. Two, maybe. Buchanan made the company bottle go a long way.

Kakissa said, "Hear me, O Koosia, have you ever seen so many white men together at one time before?"

"Once in Montreal I saw nine times nine, and three besides."

"Eh Munetoowa! Eh watche!" Kakissa said, rocking to and fro, marveling at the thought of so many white men.

CROSSEN rubbed tobacco and red willow bark together, loaded his pipe, and smoked slowly. In less than five minutes, seven of the newcomers had reappeared and were grouped beneath the pale awning, dragging on readymade cigarettes. Only the mountie and the big blond man were still inside with Buchanan.

After a while Pete Whiterobe, Buchanan's halfbreed clerk, came in sight, trotting toward the Indian camp. A hunch made Crossen move through the low door of the wickiup to meet him. Pete saw him and said in his French-Cree accent, "They lak to see you queek. Factor and le grand bourgeois from far south."

"What do they want?"

"How would I know what they want? You go damn-queek!"

Crossen was about to say they could come down to the wickiup damn quick, but he changed his mind and said, "Sure." He knocked out the heel of his pipe. "Where they from?"

"I said—from the south."

He laughed, There was nothing north of Spirit Lake except lake, tundra, and forest, a primitive country untouched by white men.

Crossen walked up the path. He'd long been used to moccasins, and even his step was like an Indian's. The newcomers had stopped talking and were watching him. He spoke and walked through the door without seeming to pay them more than the briefest attention, but the picture remained in his mind. They were not woodsmen. They were a picked group, too uniformly of a rough-tough type to come together by accident.

The trade room he entered was big, almost windowless, its walls smoked dark brown, filled with the mingled odors one associates with trading posts everywhere.

"Come in!" Buchanan called. "Here in the office, lad." Buchanan was there with Sergeant McCabe from Abitu post and the big stranger. "You already know Sergeant McCabe."

Crossen said, "Hello, Mack," and they shook hands. Then McCabe introduced the big blond man.

"This is Mr. Kordos. We wanted to see you about guiding us to the up-country."

Kordos moved over to shake hands. Light from the tiny, smoky window struck his face. He had an aggressive jaw, but aside from that his features were small and inconsequential, his eyes pale and too close together but intelligent. He was very large. Not thick, not musclebound. He was big in the way a moose is big, rangy and lean and tough.

"The up-country?" Crossen asked.

Kordos said, "Yes. We're looking for a halfbreed Cree by the name of Matoos. Do you know him?"

Crossen thought a moment and said, "Sure, I know Matoos."

"Then you'll take us to him."

"I don't know if I will or not."

The answer irked Kordos, who stood powerful and spread-legged with the corners of his mouth twisted down. "Why wouldn't you?"

"Several reasons. One is that Matoos happens to be my friend."

"Oh, the police!" Kordos' booming laugh filled the low-ceilinged room. "So you think we came nine strong to arrest your halfbreed. What an insult to the

Mounted Police!" He stopped laughing and wiped moisture to the corners of his eyes. "No, we won't arrest Matoos. That's a promise, eh, Sergeant? Only a question we want to ask him."

"You traveled a long way to ask a question of a halfbreed."

Kordos nodded and said, "Yes. A long way."

Crossen said to McCabe, "What's it all about, Mack?"

"Why, just that. We want to ask him some questions. He's committed no crime I know of. It's just necessary to find him, and you're the only man I know of who could guide us in that country beyond the forks of the Beche."

Crossen thought it over. He'd always liked McCabe, and if it hadn't been for Kordos and those hand-picked strangers outside, his answer might have been yes. Instead he lighted a pipe and said, "It'd be a long trip, and I had it in mind to paddle down to Niksa Landing for a spot of night life."

Kordos twisted his lips and said, "Night life at Niksa Landing? There's nothing there but twenty shanties and one log saloon."

"When you've spent ten solid months on the Deerpass, those twenty shacks look like Montreal. Sorry. Why don't you talk to the Yellowknives?"

McCabe said, "They wouldn't take us up the Beche and you know it."

Crossen shrugged and turned toward the door. Kordos suddenly realized he was leaving and moved over to block his path. He spoke to McCabe over Crossen's shoulder. "You mean you would let him go without guiding us?"

"I can't force him to go!"

"You of the police can't force him to go?" Kordos swore under his breath. Then he said, "Wait," to Crossen in a conciliatory tone. He looked around and saw Buchanan's whisky bottle. "Wait, have a drink." The bottle was empty. He drew a crumpled five dollar bill from his pants pocket and tossed it on the table. Crossen shrugged and turned away from the door. In the north country it's an unforgivable insult to refuse to drink with a man. Pete Whiterobe brought the bottle, handed it to Kordos who pulled the cork and handed it to Crossen. "You say you were ten months at Deerpass Hills?"

Crossen had a drink and said, "Yes."

"Trapline?"

"A short one."

"Prospect for gold?"

"A little."

"Struck it rich and now you're headed for Niksa Landing to toss a little color around. After ten months I don't know I blame you." Kordos was regarding him with his little pale eyes. He knew he hadn't struck it very rich. He was leading up to something. He drew a long, leather money folder from his pocket and commenced taking out twenty dollar bills and laying them on the table. Ten of them. He said, "If you will find Matoos for us."

"I'd still rather go to Niksa Landing."

Kordos counted out ten more. "Four hundred!"

"Try doubling it."

He showed his strong teeth and said, "Sure, I'll double it. I'll pay you this four hundred now, and the other four hundred after we've found the halfbreed."

"All right," Crossen said, putting the money in his pocket. Actually, he'd have settled for half the amount. "Start tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow," Kordos agreed.

## II

IT WAS LATE, with the last twilight in the sky, when Crossen finished getting his outfit in shape and went to bed inside Kakissa's wickiup. He awoke suddenly at a low, Indian word spoken in the darkness.

He sat up and groped instinctively, his hand closing on the cold steel of his Winchester. Kakissa was a squat figure, hunched in the door of the wickiup.

"Ka-waya?" Crossen asked.

Kakissa said, "Bourgeois Buchanan. He come talk."

"It's all right." Crossen put the Winchester back against the wall. "Tell him to come in."

Kakissa backed away, out of sight in the shadow, and Buchanan's silhouette took his place in the door. He said, "Lad, it's dark in there. Hae ye no candle?"

Crossen struck a match and lighted the grease-dip. It filled the hut with smoky, yellow light. There was whisky on Buch-

anan's breath, but he wasn't drunk.

Buchanan glanced over at the Indian and said, "I would speak wi' ye alone." He waited while Kakissa went silently outside and let the bearskin door drape swing shut behind him. Then he seated himself crosslegged on the floor.

"So you've decided to take them to Matoos? You're sure it's the right thing, lad?"

"Eight hundred dollars is the right thing."

"Aye, now, I've never been the man to turn up my nose at cash money, either. But are ye sure the big fellow will pay over the last four hundred like he said?"

"He'll pay me."

His tone made Buchanan chuckle and say, "Aye, you're the sort that collects."

Buchanan cleared his throat, uncertain how to say the thing he'd come to say. There was a half-minute of silence as the flame rose and fell, making big distorted shadows against the caribou skins that covered the walls.

Finally Crossen said, "Who are they—Kordos and that bunch?"

"I don't know. That's the truth, I don't. They're from Montreal. At least they formed their party in Montreal. So much I gathered. That, and that their mission is secret and regarded by the Mounted Police as verra important. But still, we that live here in the woods have to think of oursel'. Of our friends."

"Of Matoos?"

"Aye. What will happen to Matoos once you lead them to him?"

"I have McCabe's word on that. He promised not to arrest him. McCabe's a straight shooter. His word's good enough for me."

"Now, that's true. McCabe is a man of his word. But what about Kordos and the strong-armed lads he has with him? They are the real question."

"What do you want me to do?"

"You hae the four hundred. Your canoe is yonder. You can be ten miles down the lake before they miss ye."

"How about the other four hundred I have coming?"

Buchanan thought for a while. "Aye, the four hundred. If that's what's worrying ye, I'll give ye the money mysel'."

"You'll give it to me?"

"Aye. I'm Scotch, a herrin'-choker as they say, but not one to be stingy when it comes to helpin' a friend. I'll give ye the four hundred mysel'."

"Well, I'll be damned." Crossen decided to laugh. "I'll be damned!" he repeated.

BUCHANAN sat hunched forward, elbows on his knees. "What say ye to that, Blade?"

"No. I don't do business that way. I took his money and made a promise. I'll guide him upriver and find Matoos."

Buchanan went tight lipped, and his face looked hollow by the slanting lamplight, but he got hold of his anger, and when he spoke his voice was the same as before.

"All right. If that's your decision, I canna stop ye. But if you are a friend of Matoos as ye say, you could warn him to do no talking."

"About what?" Crossen made an exasperated gesture and lay back down on his spruce bough bed. "The hell with you, Buchanan. You got some private deal with Matoos. If you want to warn him, jump in your canoe and do it yourself. Now get out of here and let me sleep."

"If you knew the reason, then would you warn him?"

"Maybe."

"For two hundred dollars would you warn him?"

"Four hundred seems to be the going price. For four hundred I'll warn him."

"Aye, then. Four hundred it is." Buchanan reached in his hip pocket and brought out a knotted Hudson's Bay kerchief. Crossen thought he was getting ready to count out the money, but instead he untied a knot and took something between his stubby, blunt fingers. Light struck it and reflected in shafts of white fire. He was holding a diamond, square cut, broad across as the nail of his little finger.

"Where in the devil!" Crossen breathed.

"From Matoos."

"And where would he get a thing like that?"

"Found them beneath the floor of an old cabin, so he said."

"Them? You mean he has more?"

"Perhaps. I dinna know. There hae been others before. I'll tell ye the truth. For ten or twelve years he has been bringing

them in. I bought them and traded them in Winnipeg and Montreal."

"At a profit."

"Aye, at a good, solid profit, but I paid him enough. All that was good for him. Some red shirts, guns, knives, and now and then a bottle of hoochinoo."

"Then that's why the big fellow is here—tracing the stones?"

"Aye."

"They were stolen?"

"How would Matoos steal diamonds? Would he take them from these yellowdog Indians? No, Matoos found them like he said. Look at this stone—they dinna cut them like this any more. It is very old. Maybe as much as a hundred years. Probably they were hidden by some partner of the Northwest Company when they traveled like kings to the rendezvous, carried on litters, sleeping at night on brass beds, eating foods cooked by French chefs. Such a man could have hidden the jewels. If so, they belong to Matoos as much as anybody."

"If they belong to Matoos, I'll bet beaver against rabbit that McCabe will see to it he keeps them."

"McCabe! But McCabe is outnumbered one to eight."

Crossen grinned and said, "You're not worried that McCabe might see to it he sells the rest of his diamonds for what they're really worth?"

"What would Matoos do with ten thousand dollars? Buy ten thousand dollars worth of knives? But it is true it might ruin my profit."

"All right, Buchanan. You put four hundred in my pocket and I'll warn him."

## III

THEY SET OUT at dawn, Blade Crossen in the bow of the lead canoe, Kordos taking the paddle just behind him. With a wind whipping the lake to whitecaps, they followed the long route, around its timbered shore.

"Been all your life in this country?" Kordos asked.

"Eleven years," Blade Crossen said without altering the regular sweep of his paddle.

"A man can wander over a lot of country in eleven years."

"There's enough here for a hundred years."

"Lived with the Indians?"

"Sometimes."

"Some of my men think you are an Indian." He laughed when he said it, afraid that Crossen would take offense. It wasn't natural for him. He was the sort who didn't give a damn whether someone took offense or not, but with Crossen he was trying to make friends.

"Man, I envy you," he said. "What a life, wandering up rivers that are marked by dotted lines even on the police maps, looking at country no white man has ever seen before."

They crossed a mile-wide arm of the lake where the polar wind got a good sweep at them. They kept turning the canoes, quartering into the rough water.

Kordos filled his great chest and said, "Ha! the forest! the limitless blue-green forest! It seems to go on forever. I have heard, Crossen, that there are unknown valleys in the North such as most white men never dream of. I have heard there are places where the ground is warmed by hot springs so that even in the winter it seldom freezes, and the trees grow big as the trees of southern Ontario."

"The Indians tell of it."

"But are there such places? Have you seen such places?" He must have sensed the non-commital answer that Crossen was about to give for he hurried to say, "If a man was willing to pay, could you take him to such a place?"

"I don't know." Crossen laughed and added, "It might depend on how much he offered."

"Then you could. So it is true!"

They camped where the Beche flowed swift and cold from the spruce forest. After supper, most of the men hunkered close around the campfire, chain-smoking cigarettes against the swarming mosquitoes, but Kordos seemed immune to such petty nuisances and followed Crossen down to the canoe where he kept asking questions about the storied valleys of the North. He'd evidently made a study of them—not of the valleys themselves, for their actual existence was chiefly a matter of speculation, but the legends of Indians and fur traders.

He said, "In the year 1752, the fur

trader Pierre Coville left Fort William for the last time and returned to Quebec, where five years later he died. In the University there is an unprinted manuscript in which he tells of the Vallon du Eden somewhere beyond Lac Spiritu, and a river he calls the Noire. As he describes it, the vallon is always warm because of the hot springs which everywhere flow from the ground; and the trees, he says, are often large in circumference as a Cree Indian's tepee. Do you know of such a place?"

"Those old Frenchmen were all alike. They liked to go home and spin yarns."

"But every other particular of his manuscript was faultlessly exact."

"Maybe I should ask you how to get there."

Kordos was watching him very intently, his eyes small and intelligent. "Perhaps if you had read the book, then you could find it. The place names were not in English, or French even. They were in an Indian tongue—an Indian tongue that has never been catalogued by scholars. An Athapascan tongue, perhaps the Yellowknife jargon you speak so well."

"You remember the words?"

"I have them in my notebook."

CROSSEN didn't ask to see them. At lodgefires in a hundred forest villages he'd heard stories like that repeated, the fabulous Edens of the North where the sharp fangs of Windigo were never bared. Of them all, maybe a couple existed. At least one of them existed, for Crossen had seen it.

Kordos went on talking. "He spoke of springs called the sulphur pots and the pitch pots, where hot sulphur and black bitumen rose from crevices in the earth. You've heard of such things?"

"The pitch pots? Of course. I've used the stuff to calk my canoe." He turned and met Kordos' eyes. "What do you plan on doing, barreling it and selling it down in Montreal? Do you think there's oil where you find pitch? Or are you looking for a diamond mine?"

He dropped his words unexpectedly, and watched Kordos for his reaction. Kordos' eyes barely narrowed, and his jaw looked a trifle harder than before, but he was good at controlling himself.

"Why do you think I would be looking for a diamond mine?" he asked in a velvet soft voice.

Crossen shrugged it off. "I never saw a white man come into this country who wasn't looking to line his nest. Gold, furs —that was the old story. Now it's just as likely to be uranium or oil. You tell me your secrets, Kordos, and maybe I'll tell you some of mine. After eleven years of the strong cold, it could be I'd like to line my nest, too."

"With eight hundred dollars"

"With eight hundred dollars, I can get good and drunk at Niksa Landing."

"How much money do you think I carry to the North with me?"

"How much do you expect to carry out?"

Kordos stood, spread-legged and massive, watching him. He looked ugly and predatory. Then he laughed with a hard twist of his lips. "You talk like a fool," he said, and stalked back to kick his bedroll out on the ground.

At that season there was a scant three hours of darkness, and they were up again with the first sun, fighting the river current with paddle and pikepole. The going was tough where the river cut its way through an area of little pointed hills, then the country flattened and it became broad and placid. There were swamps where the current was barely noticeable and waterfowl nested by millions.

Next morning they left the marshes behind, and late afternoon brought them to the fork of the Beche. Many Yellowknives had lived there once, but now only three of the wickiups were occupied.

Crossen found an ancient Indian by the name of Wolf Tail, and after a pipeful in the smelly gloom of his wickiup, he learned that Matoos was at Koo-wa village, still another day's travel to the north.

A fine, cold rain was falling when they reached Koo-wa village. Fires burned in some of the wickiups, and smoke hung like blue mist under the treetops. They'd been sighted downstream, and the entire village was at the water's edge to meet them, men and squaws and children staring at the sight of nine white men, more than most of them had seen in all the years of their lives.

The chief, short and fat, garbed in

caribou skins heavy with beadwork, strode down with an old-time 45-90 rifle across his arm and gave the sign of friendship. Crossen met him, and they sat together beneath a spruce tree, smoking tobacco and willow bark, passing the pipe back and forth without a word as Kordos watched impatiently a dozen steps away.

"What does he say about Matoos?" Kordos finally shouted.

Neither of the men gave a sign of hearing him. When the pipe was empty the Indian said:

"You look for Matoos?"

"Yes."

"He is wanted in the skookum house of the redcoats?"

"We do not come to arrest Matoos. It is the redcoat's promise. Where is he?"

"In his cabin, up the hill trail. He has a new squaw."

Crossen laughed and said, "Not another one!"

"Matoos is a great man," the chief said. "Never does he trap, and yet each year he comes back from the trade store of the white man his canoe heavy with knives and guns and red silk shirts. And so he trades for a new squaw each time the summer moons come."

The conversation was in the Athapascan dialect, half sign language, but Kordos had been listening and he caught the repetition of Matoos' name and barked, "Well, what about him?"

Crossen's face, like the face of the chief, was perfectly composed, expressionless. He refilled the pipe, lighted it. Then he said to the chief,

"I am Matoos' friend. Send some one to him. Tell him that the redcoat is not here to arrest him. Tell him to talk, but to tell nothing of the stones he trades to Buchanan."

The chief transmitted the message to a young Indian who set off at a swift trot up the muddy pathway.

"Where's he going?" Kordos asked.

Crossen took his time in answering. "To Matoos. You don't want him to get scared and light out for the back country?"

He stood up, nodded to Kordos and McCabe, and the three of them walked up the path, through mud, across spruce needles spongy from rain. Trekell, a spare, predatory-looking man, Kordos' second-in-command, drifted along, far in the rear.

The path led them through solid, dripping forest. Then the spruce trees fell away and they caught sight of a cabin.

A man came to the door and lifted one hand in greeting. He was squat and powerful, broad faced, ugly, perhaps thirty-five. He wore gray wool trousers, beaded moccasins, and a silk shirt the hue of vermilion. He was unarmed except for a knife of Swedish manufacture that would have cost two prime skins at any trade store.

"Matoos!" Crossen said, "Wache! These men have traveled throughout the days of two moons from the great lodges of the white men to see you."

KORDOS showed his strong teeth in a smile and strode forward with his hand thrust out. Matoos looked at him with a flat lack of interest. Finally he put out his hand, perfectly lifeless, for Kordos to shake.

"Come on inside and we'll smoke a pipe together," Kordos said.

McCabe started to follow, and reconsidered. It was obvious from his expression how little the mounted policeman trusted Kordos.

In a little while they heard Kordos shouting, trying to make the halfbreed understand. Then he burst outside, looking flushed and angry. "Doesn't he understand English or French, either one?"

"Try him on Cree," Crossen said.

"You know well enough I don't speak Cree. Come on in."

Crossen found Matoos seated on a three-legged puncheon stool, hunched, with hands on knees, his eyes on Kordos.

Kordos took a position in front of him and thrust his clenched right hand out. "Look at it!" He opened his hand, revealing a diamond that shone like a crystal of white fire in the darkness. "Where did you get it? Crossen, tell him what I'm saying."

"Where'd you get it?" Crossen asked in Cree.

Matoos thought for a while, then he said, "Under old cabin on Beaver Fork."

"How many were there?"

"One stone. I found it under—"

"Buchanan says you've been trading them for years."

"Now all gone. All stones gone."

Kordos cried, "What are you talking about?"

Crossen told him, and Kordos bellowed, "He's lying. Tell the dirty breed I know he's lying."

Matoos understood English well enough, but Crossen went through the formality of translating. "He says you're a liar."

Matoos said, "Sure, all Crees liars."

Kordos asked, "What did he say then?"

"He says he's truthful, like all Crees."

"Where did you get it?" he shouted at Matoos. "Where did you get this diamond?"

"No savvy."

"You savvy me well enough. Where did you get it? A white man had it, didn't he? From white men you stole it. From white men who have hidden themselves in some valley of the north!"

Kordos had drawn himself to his full height. His two hands were lifted until the ceiling stopped them. Fury had turned his face purplish, veins stood out on his forehead. Then the halfbreed's stony lack of response made his fury break its bonds, and he swung his right fist downward like a club. It struck Matoos high on the cheek and drove him backward to the floor.

Matoos was stunned only an instant. He rolled, came to a crouch with the hunting knife drawn. He lunged, but Kordos had snatched up the puncheon stool and smashed him to the floor.

Kordos did not hesitate. He sprang to drive his heavy boots to the side of the halfbreed's head. Crossen tripped him, so that he stumbled and went face foremost across the slivery pole floor.

He rolled to his feet. For the instant he'd lost his sense of direction. He turned and saw Crossen silhouetted with the light of the doorway behind him. He roared out a curse and charged.

Crossen was carried back by the man's massive weight. The room was small. He knew instinctively he had no chance to escape. He flung himself back, struck the wall with both shoulders, his right foot braced. He rebounded, adding the power of driving leg muscles to the left hook he smashed to the point of Kordos' jaw.

Kordos took the blow. He fell back half a step. Crossen swung a right and another left. Kordos took them without blinking. He lunged in, seized Crossen, lifted him, and hurled him the length of the room.

Crossen was down with the rough pole floor under his hands. Unconsciousness was a black whirlpool threatening to engulf him. He knew that Kordos was a killer, charging to crush him under his boots. He got to hands and knees, ready to dive and clinch. Then through the spinning darkness he heard McCabe—

"Stand back, Kordos! Stand back, or I'll have to use it!"

McCabe was in the door with his Enfield revolver drawn and leveled. Kordos had drawn his own gun, but it was at arm's length, pointed at the floor. He stood and took a deep breath, getting control of himself.

Kordos said, "All right. As you say, Sergeant. You call the tune. This time, you call the tune."

## IV

WHEN THEY GOT back to the village it was misty twilight, and Crossen's right hip and shoulder pained after his collision with the cabin wall.

Kordos' men had erected their tents and tried to build a fire, but the damp wood only hissed and gave out volumes of smoke and steam.

Crossen gathered the lower dead branches of trees, built the fire up, and stood in front of its bright red warmth to dry his mackinaw. The tense antagonism of the camp was something a man could feel. Things were headed for a showdown.

Kordos decided to be conciliatory and said, "No hard feelings, Crossen? That breed just got me so damn mad."

"I didn't come because I liked you. I came because I wanted eight hundred dollars. So far you've paid me only half of it. How about the rest?"

"When you got it, what then?"

"I don't know. Maybe I'll head down for Niksa Landing. Maybe I'll find me a Yellowknife girl and stay here."

"You always do what you want?" Kordos mused.

Crossen grinned from one side of his mouth and said, "I try to."

"Why do you stay in this country? Why don't you make your stake and go out-

side? To Vancouver, or down to the States. Get yourself a white woman instead of these lousy squaws, a bed instead of a rabbitskin blanket."

Crossen shrugged and looked at the fire. It was almost as though those little eyes of Kordos' were able to see beneath the surface and read a man's thoughts. He'd drifted North from Chipewayan eleven years ago with the idea of grabbing a quick stake and getting outside. There'd been a girl waiting for him back in the States. He thought of her now, trying to remember what she looked like. Probably she'd married someone else long ago. Given him up for dead.

"I've made a couple of little stakes," he said, more to himself than to Kordos. "But I blew them again."

"Gold?"

"Gold—furs—"

Kordos laid a heavy hand on his shoulder and said, "I like you, Crossen. You know why? Because you have none of the hypocrisy a man finds outside. Because if you hate a man you say so. You hate me, but that's all right. You're still my kind."

He pulled his shoulder free and said, "What you leading up to?"

"Why, about that stake you're looking for. That big stake. A stake so big you can say the hell with this rotten North Country forever."

"Diamonds?"

"Yes, diamonds. Rubies, and emeralds. You name it, and you'll probably be right."

"Maybe Matoos has traded them all away."

Kordos spat at the fire. "He can keep his diamonds. Trade them for his red silk shirts and hunting knives. Listen, on our way upriver I asked you about the hidden valleys of the North. Now I'll tell you something. Somewhere—" he cast a gesture outward, "out there, is a cache of diamonds, rubies, and emeralds that would make us millionaires."

Kordos had a way about him. He had power and conviction, and for a moment it almost seemed that he was speaking the truth. Then Crossen said, "You're offering me that instead of my four hundred dollars. Pay me my four hundred first, and we'll talk about the million afterward."

"Tomorrow I'll pay you your four hundred."

"I want it now!"

"No. Not tonight. I'll tell you why. Because I don't want to wake up tomorrow morning and find you've made a fool out of yourself and headed into the bush. I want you to think awhile before tossing a fortune away."

Crossen thought about it after supper as he lay inside the darkness of the tent. It was raining, a drizzle fine as solidified mist that made a slight hissing noise on the damp-hardened canvas overhead. He could hear the breathing of men, the bark and snarl of malemutes in the Yellowknife village.

He went to sleep—a wary, hair-trigger sleep. Something snapped it. He sat up and listened. It was quiet. Even the rain had stopped. Just the occasional thud of a big drop that distilled and fell off a branch of a spruce tree. He reached, found his Winchester, laid it across his bed, and, still seated, dressed himself.

The bed beside him was empty. Odette had been sleeping there. He wondered how many of the others were gone.

He stood, hunched beneath the tent's slanting roof, and groped till he found the tent flap. Someone had tied it on the outside. He drew his H.B.C. knife, cut the strings, and went outside.

There was no sign of moon nor stars, but a slight grayness filtered through and larger objects were visible.

HE STOPPED to button his mackinaw, his eyes on McCabe's tent. Something was wrong, but it took him a moment to decide what. The flap was hanging loose, and he knew that McCabe always fastened it on the inside. He started towards it, but a man moved from the shadow of the spruce tree with a rifle ready. It was stooped, heavy Paul Graves.

"Where you headed?" Graves asked.

Crossen stood back on the heels of his moccasins, the Winchester across his two arms, watching him. Instead of answering, he asked, "Where's McCabe?"

"In his tent!" He bristled as he said it. "What made you think he wasn't in his tent?"

"How do you know what I think?" He was about to go on.

"You stand where y' are."

"Why?"

"Kordos doesn't want anybody prowling camp. You better get back inside."

"Where's Kordos?"

Graves' lips twisted in a sour laugh and he said. "You're just filled up with questions, aren't you?"

"He started up to Matoos' cabin, didn't he? And then McCabe followed him."

"I told you McCabe was in his tent. Now get back inside where it's nice and dry and nothing will happen to you. That's the way the boss wants it. He wants nothing to happen to you."

"Then you wouldn't dare put a 30-30 slug through me, would you?" He turned with his Winchester still across his arms as though to return to his tent. He stopped a quarter way around, and suddenly Graves realized the barrel was aimed at him.

"Anybody care what happens to you?" Crossen asked.

Graves took half a step back. He looked sick-scared. He opened his hands and let his rifle fall. It was still cocked, but the shock failed to make it explode. There was a Colt revolver strapped around his waist. Crossen plucked it from the holster and thrust it in his mackinaw pocket.

"Now tell me where they are."

Graves tried to say something, but the dryness of his mouth stopped him. On the third attempt he whispered, "They left an hour ago."

"McCabe followed him!"

"Yeah."

Crossen backed off toward the village street. "Don't try to get up there ahead of me. Stay where you are."

"Yeah!" Graves whispered.

When he reached the edge of the timber, Crossen stopped to look back. Graves was still there. He walked on, slowly, through the opaque, misty blackness of the forest. He groped his way. After long blindness he glimpsed a ragged bit of light through the trees. He walked on and it became a rectangle—candlelight shining from the open door of Matoos' shanty.

He stopped then. A man was inside, moving around. Only his shadow visible. Crossen left the path and threaded his way through brush and jacktimber until he was behind the shanty, then he crossed and peered through a thin slot where moss chinking had fallen from between the logs. It was Kordos inside as he'd supposed. The man was leaning over, lifting the floor poles one after another, searching the ground beneath.

Crossen kept pulling the moss from between the logs, enlarging the chink. He could see the silhouette of a second man then. He seemed to be standing with arms outflung. Then Crossen realized he was limp, suspended by thongs that ran from his wrists to the rafters.

"Drop your gun, Crossen," someone said behind him.

He started around with his rifle and checked himself. It was Trekell, and he had the drop. The man edged forward warily expecting a trick. "Don't you try nothin'."

"All right," Crossen said and let the Winchester fall.

"Get rid of the Colt, too. Take it out with two fingers."

He obeyed.

Kordos had heard them and came outside. "Trek?" he said, from around the corner. "What's wrong?"

"You were right about Crossen being a one-eyed sleeper. He followed us, and here he is."

Kordos cursed under his breath. He came in sight with his revolver drawn, stood for a while at the corner to make sure there were only the two of them, and rammed it back in its holster.

"What are you looking for?" he asked, watching Crossen's face.

"I guess just about what I found."

KORDOS saw the unchinked logs then and knew he'd been peeping through. "All right, so I killed him."

"How about McCabe? Did you kill him, too?"

"Of course not."

"Where is he?"

"He's dead, but it was none of my doing."

Somehow, the admission that McCabe was dead failed to be a shock. "I suppose it was Matoos that killed him."

Kordos shouted, "Yes, it was Matoos!"

Crossen let his shoulders jerk in a hard laugh.

"You think I'm lying?"

"What difference does it make what I think?"

Trekell still had the rifle at his back, but Crossen ignored it and leaned to pick up his guns.

Trekell cried, "Leave 'em be!"

"The hell with you. You'll kill me if you want to anyway."

Kordos said, "Careful, Trek!", and Crossen knew he was safe enough. Safe for the moment anyway. He drew out a handkerchief, wiped mud off the guns, put the revolver in his pocket and let the rifle hang in the crook of his arm. Kordos and Trekell remained one on each side of of him, wary and alert.

He said, "Don't worry. I'll not start anything. Let's go inside."

He walked around the cabin and stopped in the door. From between the logs, he'd been able to see only Matoos' uncertain silhouette; now the candlelight struck him and he saw that he'd been stripped to the waist and beaten until his back was a mass of raw flesh. His head sagged sharply over and to one side, so his neck had been broken.

"Make a mistake and hit him too hard?" He said it carelessly, with no hint of the nausea that the sight gave him.

Kordos said, "Don't you think he deserved it after killing the policeman? Or do you still think I killed them both?"

"What the hell difference does it make what I believe? This is Koo-wa village, and it's a long way north of Edmonton. It's north of the law, and north of everything a white man calls civilization. Here you can do what you please. You can knife the mountie, and beat the breed to death; and if I don't like it, why you can kill me, too."

"You got guts," Kordos said in a musing voice. "I admire a man like you with guts. It is true I have no fear of you. Had I killed the policeman, which I did not, there would be no reason for me to lie about it. But McCabe was my friend. He came here to question the breed. I followed, and found him knifed. So I did that. I strung up the breed as you see and whipped him to find out why he had killed the policeman. No savvy! he said. But when I was through, he did savvy."

A babiche whip had been tossed in one corner. It was a cluster of wire-hard thongs drawn together and knotted in a handle weighted with a chunk of bullet lead.

Crossen said, "Good hunch you had, bringing the whip along."

Kordos laughed. "You will generally find me prepared." He was smug and satisfied with himself, and hatred of him was like something clawing at Crossen's guts. Still he kept it from showing on his face.

"He told you about the diamonds?" Crossen asked.

Kordos shrugged and said, "He told me a few things."

"Find his cache?"

"His few stones, they are nothing. Nothing compared with the cache waiting for us out there." It was significant the way he said us, with a tiny smile, a slight droop of one eyelid that Trekell, still in the doorway, couldn't see. He went on, slowly, "Wouldn't you like to help us look for them across the swamps of Nipphauk, beyond the sulphur water, in the valley watched over by the three sisters?"

Crossen had no choice. He'd serve as Kordos' guide, or end up like Matoos, suspended by his wrists and the flesh torn off his back.

"I'd like it," he said. "I'd like it fine."

## V

ODETTE, a quarterbreed Blackfoot from the Belly River country, joined them on their way back to camp. He was a dark, taciturn man, the scout of Kordos' party. He walked with them silently for a few seconds and then said something about Matoos' squaw knowing what had happened.

"Where is she?" Kordos asked, and Odette shrugged, meaning he didn't know.

The Yellowknife village was filled with movement. From one of the wickiups came a chanting howl as women joined in a death chant.

"We won't wait until morning," Kordos said. "We'll get out now."

The tents were down in five minutes, rolled in bundles heavy from rain, tossed in the canoes. They looked to Crossen for direction, and he said, "Upriver!"

Dawn came through drifting layers of mist, but it was afternoon before the sun

came through, a pale, white disc with no heat in it. They ate cold biscuit and kept going. The sun slipped behind a cloud bank and it was evening when they finally pulled in to shore.

When supper was finished, Crossen stripped to his underwear and dried his clothes at the fire. Kordos came up behind him, picked his teeth with the point of a hunting knife, and said,

*"The swamps of Nipphauk, beyond the sulphur water, into the valley watched over by the three sisters.* You know what he meant?"

"Matoos told you that?"

"Yes, and don't say I was tricked. Even a Cree-breed will tell the truth when he's blind from pain. Think you can take us to the place he was talking about?"

"What if I couldn't?"

Kordos took time to finish picking meat from his teeth. He put the knife away. "Why, in that case, you wouldn't be much use to me, would you?"

Crossen jerked out a short laugh and said he knew the way perfectly.

For three days they followed the river northward as it forked again and again. It dimished in size, became barely a creek, flowing between sharply cleft banks. They were forced to walk and propel the canoes by means of lines and pikepoles. Then even that became impossible, and they portaged over a low bulge of country thickly studded with dwarf timber.

They reached a muskeg, level and apparently without limit. There were no trees, only brush that grew in stray patches. The footing was uncertain. It trembled under a man's weight, a vast island of moss floating on muck and water. Mosquitoes lay in the grass to rise in never-ending swarms. They became a major obstacle. No man could travel without the protection of netting, and at every stop a smudge fire had to be built before one could eat or rest.

It was impossible to pitch tents in the muskeg, and sleep without their protection was out of the question. So they kept going, afoot for many miles, then down a currentless waterway which, after long, apparently aimless wandering, led them to a chain of little lakes that they followed northeastward.

They were in forest again, with little hills breaking the country's level monotony. An odor, faintly unpleasant, hung in the air, and that night they reached the first of the sulphur springs.

The springs rose from rifts that broke irregularly across a mile-wide stretch of rock. Everywhere were little streams of warm water.

Crossen lay full length and drank. The water was only faintly unpleasant from dissolved hydrogen sulphide.

He sat up and wiped water from his nose and chin. Kordos was standing over him.

His face was puffed from mosquito poisoning so it was scarcely recognizable.

"This is the sulphur springs?"

"Yes."

"I have to hand it to you, Crossen, you know the country. I thought we were lost back there in the muskegs. Our next stop should be the valley of the three sisters. Where is it?"

Crossen shrugged and said, "If I told you that, you'd have no further use of me."

They slept with their beds on clean swept rock within the smell of the sulphur water, but no one complained, for the air was clear of mosquitoes. Next day they traveled across one hot-spring terrace after another, and then along a river, through forest where trees grew larger than any they'd seen since leaving Spirit Lake. The air was clear again, filled with the pure scent of the forest. Game was plentiful, and that night they ate the flesh of a caribou calf siwashed over the coals. Late the next afternoon they sighted a cabin at the edge of a clearing.

Kordos signaled and went ashore, advancing warily on the cabin until he was sure it was abandoned. Then he examined it. Its logs were set upright after the manner of forts built by the early French fur traders, but they were keyed differently and pinned with wooden pegs. A few pieces of rude, axe-built furniture stood inside amid a pack-rat accumulation of several seasons.

"We'll stop here," Kordos said.

He chose a campsite well concealed by brush and allowed only a tiny cookfire of smokeless aspen twigs. Then he sent Odette to scout from the surrounding hillside.

TWILIGHT settled. A wary anticipation settled over the camp. Kordos kept watch for Odette, and cursed under his breath when he did not return. He looked around and said to Graves, "Maybe you'd better try to find him."

A gun exploded in the distance. Just one sharp crack, with echoes bounding after it.

Crossen instinctively went to one knee, his Winchester in his hands. He listened. The shot had been fired about half a mile away.

Now with the echoes gone, it seemed very quiet.

After a period of waiting, a man called from the forest. Odette. "Hello, there! Me!"

Kordos stood up and said, "All right, come on."

"Well, what was it?" he asked when Odette came in sight.

"Man. White man. He was watching us. I killed him."

"I told you not to fire your gun! I should have made you leave it in camp."

Odette wasn't cowed by Kordos like some of the others, and he growled back, "Maybe you'd rather he got loose with the big news of our coming!"

He thought it over.

"No. No, Odette, you did right. You killed him. You're sure he's dead? Where is he? I'd like to—"

"He'll wait for us." Odette leaned his rifle against a tree and looked around for something to eat. He found some bannack and commenced munching it.

"He was alone?" Kordos said it with the obvious assumption that he was, and it was like a blow in the face when Odette shook his head. "What?" he roared, "You mean—"

"Maybe he was alone and maybe not." Odette kept chewing the bannack. He was a heavy, swarthy, taciturn man with cruel eyes. "I saw two sets of tracks."

"Then, of course there are two men!"

Kordos stood cursing in a raw whisper. "We'll have to make sure. We have to follow. We can't let anyone warn them. There aren't enough of us. If there's another man, we'll have to kill him. No. Don't kill him. Catch him alive if you can. He might tell us something. Odette, you take Marcus and get on his trail."

Odette said, "After dark I'm supposed to trail him? How, like a hound, with my nose?"

Kordos roared, "Follow him!" He watched with narrow eyes while the surly Odette put more of the bannack in his pocket and picked up his rifle to go. Then he said, "Graves, you follow the high country and try to sight him from there. Trekell, take the canoe. Go downriver. Ten or twelve miles downriver. Then cache yourself."

Trekell jerked his head at Crossen and said, "Who'll guard him?"

"We don't need him anymore."

Crossen knew they'd kill him once his usefulness was finished, but it was a shock, coming so soon. Trekell had his rifle raised. There was no chance to shoot it out.

Crossen dived, and Trekell's gun exploded at almost the identical instant.

The shot deafened him. He felt the whip and burn of powder across his cheek. He was flat, amid twigs and rough brush. He rolled over as a second bullet plowed the ground. A windfall partly blocked his way. He lunged over it, hidden momentarily from Trekell, but Kordos had his revolver out. He fired.

The bullet struck Crossen. Its impact was like a sledge against his ribs.

He was down, but instinct kept him going, crawling, clawing through brush. It seemed like minutes, but actually no more than fifteen seconds could have elapsed. Back of him he could hear the crash of pursuit.

Kordos was roaring commands. Crossen came to a crouch over the yard-high cover of fox brush, and unexpectedly, there was Trekell less than twenty feet away.

Trekell was partly turned. He tried to bring his rifle around, but there was no time.

Crossen fired with his Winchester aimed across his waist. The high-velocity slug hit Trekell and spun him on the balls of his feet. He dropped his rifle and took five or six steps before the life went out of him and he plunged face first in a tangle of cranberry brush.

Crossen barely hesitated. He rocked to his feet and ran as best he could with the bullet wound dragging at his side.

## VI

CROSSEN KEPT running until the sound of pursuit was muffled by the forest. Blood was sponging through his mackinaw. He stopped, opened his clothing, and looked at the wound. The bullet had creased his side, nicked some of his lower ribs, and glanced away. The ribs were probably broken, but the wound wasn't serious provided he could check the bleeding.

He gathered dry moss, made balls of it the size of his fist, and pressed them to the bullet wound, afterward binding them tightly with strips torn from his shirt. He went on then, holding stiffly erect so as not to disturb the packs, and reached the river. He was now about a couple miles below camp.

The stream was too swift to ford. He followed its rocky bank for another mile, bound two logs together with wattape fibers—the tough, stringy roots of a pine that had been exposed beneath an undercut bank—and using the stock of his Winchester for a paddle, crossed.

He felt safer then. He headed into the forest, climbing, until at last, weak from fatigue, he fell on the ground and slept.

When he awakened it was late night and the wolves were howling. He felt for his guns. The revolver was gone but he still had the Winchester. His side seemed tight, as though the skin had contracted and turned hard. It itched, too, but the bleeding had stopped.

He went on, picked a slow course across windfalls and slide rock. Through a cleft in timber he had a moonlit view of the country.

Hills rose ahead, but there were no prominent summits to justify the term "Three Sisters." A breeze came from the valley, carrying a faint tang of woodsmoke.

He found a game trail, followed it until dawn, and finally stopped on a bluff overlooking the river.

He was loading his pipe with tobacco and red willow when movement attracted his eyes below.

A man had emerged from timber and was creeping forward with a rifle in one hand. He kept moving until he reached a heap of weather-whitened drift logs along a backwash, and there, resting on one knee, he peered at something upriver. It was too far to make out the man's features, but his mannerisms identified him. Paul Graves. Kordos had sent him ahead in the canoe.

Crossen's gaze went upriver a quarter mile and saw a second man, a stranger to him, kneeling at the point of a gravel bar, dipping a handkerchief, wringing it to a damp ball, bathing his face. After a minute he put the handkerchief away, picked up a rifle, and moved with a swift, bounding step back to the shore.

The sun, rising, made a glare on the river so Crossen had to guess at his position, but he could see Graves crouch forward and slowly lift his rifle.

Acting quickly, Crossen levered a cartridge into the barrel of his Winchester, aimed at a spot ten feet over Graves' head, and fired.

It was extreme range, but the bullet arched close enough to send Graves diving sidewise, and thence on all fours in a mad scramble for the timber.

Crossen gave Graves no more consideration. A coward, he'd keep running. All Crossen wanted now was a sight of the other man, a chance to stop him, talk to him. He went downhill, digging the heels of his moccasins to check his descent.

A bullet stirred the pebbles five feet to one side. The sharp crack of the rifle came an instant later. The stranger was shooting at him. He found concealment in scrub pine. Below, rising in the sunshine, he glimpsed a bluish puff of powdersmoke.

The man came in sight, running with a swift, animal grace through a clearing. Suddenly, with a shock, he realized it was not a man, but a girl.

She was a blonde, with her hair tied in a tight knot at the back of her neck. She was dressed entirely in buckskins. They fitted her well, revealing the conformation of her young body.

He called, "Girl, wait! I won't harm you!"

She whirled and fired at the sound of his voice, aiming her rifle waist high. The bullet was wide. An instant later she was gone in the timber.

HE RAN until he reached the river. His wounded side burned, but he

kept running. He saw her again, and he might have intercepted her, but the river intervened. He called again, but it was no use. At last, weak and sweating with a pounding pulse, he flung himself on the ground to rest. When he came to, his clothes were clammy and his teeth chattered. The side of his mackinaw was again heavy from blood. Dizziness kept passing his eyes in hot waves.

He slept again and awoke. The chill was gone, and he was thirsty. He got to his knees and steadied himself, but the click of a gun hammer jarred him to the spot.

"Stop!" It was the voice of the girl.

He rested with his hands on the ground, took a deep breath, and looked. The effort had momentarily blinded him. Then his eyes focused and he saw her face.

She was beautiful. In a city, among other white women, she'd have been beautiful. To him, a man who'd seen no white woman in better than twelve months, she was miraculous, like something out of a dream. She was a trifle under average height, very slim. Her features were delicate and perfect.

In her hands was a short-barreled rifle, a lever action gun of unusual design, some European make he'd never seen before. She kept it aimed. He could see the rear sight with the front one notched into it. She held it steady, but excitement showed in the throb of an artery in her throat.

He remained very still. He mustn't startle her. Any wrong move would bring her finger down on the trigger.

"I'm wounded," he said.

She looked at the blood-hardened side of his mackinaw and back at his face. "Who are you?"

"My name's Crossen."

"You were with them—with those men who killed Pavel."

"I was their prisoner. I got away last night about dark. They shot me in the side, but I got away. This morning I was on the hillside and saw you washing your face. They'd sent a man ahead in a canoe to ambush you, and I saw him, too. He was hiding in that backwater behind the driftwood. You'd have walked directly onto him if I hadn't shot."

He talked slowly, using as much time as he could, trying to calm her. She shifted the gun barrel, only a little, but enough so the bullet would miss if the gun discharged accidently.

She asked, "Where are you from?"

"Spirit Lake post."

She said something in a lisping tongue he'd never heard before. It could have been Eskimo dialect, but he didn't think so. She was watching him closely.

"No savvy," he said.

"Are you a Russian?"

It seemed like a strange question. "No. American."

There was a fine excellence in her pronunciation, but English was not native to her. It added to the mystery of her being there, as though she came from another world.

She said, "Those men, why are they here?"

"A halfbreed was trading some diamonds. They came north tracing them."

Her lips formed the word, "Matoos!"

"Yes, Matoos. He was from here, then? From this valley?"

"He was a thief! Is he with them?"

"Matoos is dead. Kordos killed him."

"Kordos?"

"He's their leader."

Crossen had been resting on one knee. He stood up now, and she took a quick step back. "Don't try anything, please. I don't want to kill you."

"I don't want you to, either."

She said, "What is he planning to do? That man you talk of, Kordos?"

"He thinks you have a treasure here and he's after it. He's out to get it any way he can. I suppose by killing you all, if he has to."

"Treasure?" The meaning of the word seemed to escape her.

"Jewels. Money."

"That's what he wants?" She seemed to think it ridiculous that anyone would search for such things. Unexpectedly she lowered the rifle and said, "You hate him, don't you?"

It was less a question than a plea for him to say yes. He understood how she felt. She was all alone. She needed him as a friend.

He considered for a while before answering, "Yes, I do hate him. I don't think I ever really hated a man before, but I hate him."

It had made him weak to stand. Flickers of blindness kept racing across his eyeballs. The ground seemed to tilt under his feet. He reached for a tree trunk to steady himself, but it wasn't where he expected. He had no sensation of falling, but next thing he realized he was down, with the girl bending over him.

He said, "I took a bullet in the side. I lost some blood. I guess I—need some rest."

She quickly took off her buckskin jacket, made a roll of it, and put it under his head as a pillow. Then she opened his mackinaw and looked at his wound.

Sight of it made her take a deep breath. For a second she seemed to be a little sick. Blood and the moss packs made it look worse than it was.

He said, "You go get me a drink. I'll take care of the bandage."

SHE SHOOK her head and, tight-lipped, removed the blood-soaked moss herself. Despite pain, he was aware of the perfume of her skin and hair, the warmth of her body.

It had been a long time since he'd been that close to a white girl.

He started to speak, but she quieted him with a quick shake of her head and hurried to the river, returning with water-filled moss which she used to bathe the wound. Then she washed the bandage and put it back.

"Try to sleep," she said.

"Girl, there's no time to sleep. Kordos will be here after us."

"You can't travel."

"I'll take care of myself. You'd better get going. Warn your settlement."

She just pressed her lips tightly and shook her head. "Rest for a while!"

He lay back and closed his eyes. He had no intention of sleeping, but he did, and when he awoke the sun was noon-hot.

He sat up and looked around for the girl.

Now that the fever was gone, she seemed like part of his dream. He looked at his side and saw the neat, freshly washed bandage just getting dry. She'd been real enough to do that.

He stood up, slowly, testing his legs. He felt a little weak, but not dizzy. He'd be all right now.

The river was fifty yards away. He reached it just as a canoe came in sight around a wooded point downstream. There was one person in it—the girl.

She was good with a paddle, maneuvering the birch craft deftly through the rock-spotted current, hunting the shallows near shore. He walked to meet her. She shouted something, but her words were drowned by the rush of water. There was no chance of beaching the canoe on the jagged shore, so he waded to his knees and got hold of the gunwhale.

She said, "It won't help you to get chilled."

"I'm all right now."

He put his rifle where it would keep dry and climbed over the side. The canoe slipped rapidly downstream, around the point.

"Who are you?" he asked.

Her back was turned, and she gave no sign of hearing him.

He said, "You asked me that question." Then he asked, "But of course, you had a gun on me."

"I'm—Anna."

"How did you get in this forgotten end of the North?"

"I've been here all my life."

"You were born here?"

"Yes."

He knew of no white settlement between Spirit Lake and Coronation Gulf, but his memory went back to a campfire on the shore of Lake Grandin many years before where a renegade Indian by the name of Weasel Tail had told of a race "more white than the white men" who lived in a "castle with an onion on top, in the valley of warm waters where the muskegs meet the barrens of Windigo".

He said, "Where is this settlement?"

"I can't take you there."

"Why?"

"They might kill you."

"Who?"

"Melikov. Even my brother."

"Why would they kill me?"

"Because you're from the outside."

"Even if I saved their necks?"

She thought for a while and shook her head. "I don't know. I've warned you now. You can do as you please."

He laughed and said, "Between Melikov or Kordos, I'll choose Melikov."

## VII

AFTER MANY MILES down the swift river they cleared a point and sighted a canoe dock with a cluster of shanties and wickiups sprawled along a shoulder of bank above.

"This it?" he asked.

Anna nodded without turning, and pointed outward, beyond the Indian village, so he knew that the white settlement was still some distance away.

A tall, very lean Indian emerged from the timber carrying a rifle in one hand, and ran down to the canoe float to grab the babiche line that Anna tossed to him. He made fast and said something in a spineless, lisping tongue that Crossen did not understand. The girl answered, there was a mention of Melikov's name, then she said, "This way," to Crossen and led him past the Indian village with its barking dogs and smoky smells and through half a mile of timber to the edge of a wide clearing.

The building he caught sight of there brought him to a surprised stop. It stood inside a stockade, topping a rocky knoll. It was built entirely of logs, one story pyramided on another, the whole surmounted by a bulbous cupola of a kind he'd once seen on the old church at St. Michael at the mouth of the Yukon. Lesser log structures surrounded it, some of them mere cabins, others dwellings or storehouses as much as two hudred feet in length. The stockade was made of pointed posts. It was a rough circle five or six hundred yards in diameter around the base of the knoll.

They walked up the steepening path to the closed gate. A white man with a lumpy and pockmarked face leaned from a blockhouse window to peer at Crossen until the girl said something in the same strange tongue she'd used with the Indian, and he answered, nodding violently, and hurried to open the gate.

Men and women crowded outside the log houses to stare at him. Only a couple of the men were white, the others were halfbreeds or Indians. The women all seemed to be fullbloods. Anna led him up a steep pathway, past the little-used main entrance of the big house, to a door which was opened for them by an erect old man garbed in a peculiar, shirtlike capote, his loose trousers stuffed inside home-made knee boots.

A long dark passageway led to the depth of the building. She opened a second door, and they entered a room, low-ceilinged, windowless, filled with the glow and warmth of a fire.

Anna said something, and a man's deep voice answered her, calling her by name. Crossen tried to see him and couldn't. He was somewhere in shadow beyond the fire.

She said, "I have here a man who saved my life. He is wounded. His name is Crossen. He is an American."

"Melikov," the man said, introducing himself as he stepped forward. He was about sixty, not a big man, but he gave the impression of strength. He'd been blond once, but now his hair and moustache were completely white. His greeting was civil, but that was all. He made no pretense at being pleased. "Why are you here?"

"I came with Kordos." He watched Melikov as he mentioned the name, but apparently it meant nothing to him. He went on talking and told briefly the events from the time he left Spirit Lake until he'd seen Graves waiting to ambush the girl.

Anna, who'd been watching Melikov's face, cried, "It is true the man would have killed me!"

Melikov looked at her with a slight softening of his expression as he said, "Ah, Anna! How little you know about the world of men. You can travel like a deer, and shoot like the devil's own wife, but here," he smote his heart, "here, inside, you are a little white dove. What do you know about the depth of trickery to which men go to win a handful of glittering stones, to murder the ones they hate? Of course, someone was waiting to ambush you," he pointed to Crossen, "but did this man kill him? Answer, did he?"

Anna shook her head, and her lips formed the word, "No."

"Then perhaps they plotted it all together. So you would bring him here, as you have."

Crossen said, "Don't be a fool. Do you think I'd let somebody shoot me in the ribs so I could get inside as a spy?" He pulled open his mackinaw. "Look for your-

self. That bullet was too close to be fooling."

Melikov lifted his shoulders and let them fall, saying "Perhaps," in a manner which showed he had no intention of changing his mind. He reached and patted Anna on the cheek. "I am sorry, little one. Perhaps he is right and I am being the fool, but what else can I do? One mistake and it would be over for us—over for Papa-Niko—you understand? It is the old sacrifice we must make once and keep making."

She cried, "It's making no sacrifice for Papa-Niko if we turn our back on someone who can save us."

"Eh-so," he sighed, lifting his shoulders once again. He loaded a pipe with Indian tobacco and lighted it with a branch from the fire. "Where is Pavel?" he asked.

"Dead."

His face turned savage and he cried, "Killed? Who did it?"

"Them. The strangers."

He gestured at Crossen, "Or him!"

"No!"

"You saw who killed him?"

She shook her head.

Crossen still had his Winchester, and Melikov, imagining a threat, said, "Don't try anything. You'd never get out alive."

There was someone in the shadow behind him. Crossen turned slowly and watched a man move into the firelight. The same guardsman who'd let them through the outside door. He had a rifle, cocked and aimed.

Melikov said, "Give him your gun."

"Sure." Crossen laid his Winchester on the table. Then he asked, "What are you going to do with me?"

Melikov lifted his shoulders and let them fall. The girl started to speak, but he silenced her. He said something to the guardsman, who jerked his gun in the direction of the door, a command for Crossen to go with him.

## VIII

HE WAS TAKEN to some rough-hewn stairs. The wound was like a weight dragging at his side. He tripped and fell and for a moment he was too weak to get up. The guard called, "Watsoo!" and an Indian boy appeared at the head of the stairs.

Crossen got to one knee and said, "Don't worry, I couldn't make it from here to the stockade."

He got up and climbed as the Indian boy backed away, watching him, and the old guardsman followed with his cocked rifle.

A door was open. It led to a barren room with a tiny cleft window and a hay-filled bunk against one wall. He lay down in the bunk, with fatigue making a hot wave through his body, and fell asleep.

He awoke with the realization that several hours had passed. He got up. It didn't make him dizzy this time, but he'd been feverish and it left him with a burning thirst. He walked to the door and asked for water. No one answered. He tried the door, knowing it would be locked. He cursed a little, spat from his dry mouth. and spent some time looking from the tiny window. The small opening through thick logs gave a narrow view of some roofs, a bit of stockade, and the steep gulch country beyond.

He sat down. Inside the house it was silent until, after the slow passage of an hour, he heard the pure, harplike sound of a stringed instrument and the singing of a girl. The beauty of it made him hold his breath to listen. He was sure the voice was Anna's.

Her song was unfamiliar, unlike any he'd ever heard. It had a sad, almost Oriental quality. She finished and he sat without moving, hoping she'd sing more, but she didn't, and there was a step out in the hall.

The door opened. An Indian woman had brought him a bowl of warm water, a towel, a comb. He cleaned up and the old guardsman took him to what was evidently the great room of the castle.

Surprise brought him to a stop just inside the door. The ceiling was two stories high, supported by pillars and beams that were simply the massive, squared trunks of trees. In a fireplace large as an average cabin a high pyramid of logs was blazing, but even such a fire scarcely illuminated the far walls, and seal-oil lamps burned in brackets around them. A table of whip-sawed plank stood in the full flame of the fire, and it gleamed of silver and white cloth as no table he'd ever seen in the

A girl in a long, blue velvet dress came towards him. It took him a couple of seconds to realize it was Anna. Her hair had been brushed, braided, and coiled around her head. She looked taller, more womanly. She asked him how he felt, and he managed to make some sort of an answer.

There were others in the room. He noticed Melikov, five other men, a woman of about sixty. Anna took him by the sleeve and led him across the room. He thought she intended to introduce him to the elderly woman, but instead she stopped and curtseyed before a very old man who was seated in a huge, carved chair.

She spoke French, not the "Coyotie-French" common in the northland, but a pure Parisian that Crossen scarcely understood, calling the old man "Papa-Niko" and introducing Crossen as their Americain visitor.

The old man kept nodding, smiling, but it was hard to tell whether he really saw or understood anything. His senses seemed to have been glazed over by the years.

"Oui!" he said. Then "Yes," and moved his long, transparent-looking fingers in a gesture Crossen did not understand.

"He wants you to go to him," Anna said.

Crossen stepped forward, and the old man passed a limp hand for him to shake. On his middle finger was a ring so massive it seemed to take most of his strength to lift it.

"Americain," he said. Then he gave it the English pronunciation, "American," and went on, speaking in that tongue, bringing the words with difficulty. "The American I have always admired. A brave new people, building without the slavery of custom. Of all slaveries custom is the greatest. So said Pushkin." He repeated some words in the spineless tongue which Crossen suddenly realized must be Russian. "You have read Pushkin?"

Crossen shook his head, and the old man whispered sadly, "I have read Lincoln, you should read Pushkin."

Melikov came up and said, "Papa-Niko, would it be your pleasure to dine?"

The old man inclined his head with extreme gravity, stood gathering the rags of a once magnificent Cossack blouse about him, and walked to the chair at the head of the table.

Now for the first time Crossen had a good look at the others. Only one of the men was young. He was in his late teens, and strikingly like Anna. The others were all in their sixties or seventies.

Papa-Niko said a prayer and struck a home-made bell. At the signal, two half-breed boys came in and commenced serving dinner.

The meal consisted of roast caribou loin, tiny new potatoes and carrots, and bread made of coarse wheat flour. There were no canned foods, nothing brought in from outside. Even the salt was coarse and grayish, the product of Indian evaporation pans.

LITTLE was said during the first part of the meal. Crossen was ravenous after a day without food, but when the edge was off his appetite he commenced to watch Papa-Niko. He wondered how old he was. Eighty, perhaps, or eighty-five. He was small, but not withered. His eyes were still intensely blue, and when he looked at things they had a childlike expression. He ate little, only a nibble here and there, pausing each time to touch his lips lightly with a very old linen napkin.

"America," he said after a long period of reverie, and went on, hunting the words, sometimes pausing for many seconds. "I heard once a prima donna from America. Your Geraldine Farrar. She is still the toast of your opera—" He snapped his fingers to remember the name. "Your Metropolitan?"

The name came faintly from the past, when he was a little boy. A star of the silent movies had been named Geraldine Farrar, but she'd been a prima donna, too. He had no idea whether she was still alive or not. "She's—retired."

"Ah, too bad. Glorious voice. We heard her, do you remember, Yakub? In the blue room where Androvitch was married?"

The old man he called Yakub nodded gravely. Papa-Niko lapsed into a reverie, his eyes almost closed, a half-smile on his lips. Melikov set off on a long, determined dissertation on growing vegetables during the short season in the North, and how an extra month's ripening time could be

gained by covering plants beneath cured hay just prior to August 20th when the first frost could be expected; but he failed to shift the direction of the old man's thoughts who brightened and said,

"Another—your stage star. John Drew. I must tell you of my meeting with him at Monte Carlo." He nibbled some more, touched his lips with the napkin, and apparently forgot that he'd even been talking. Dinner was finished, but no one moved, waiting for Papa-Niko. Finally he noticed, said hurriedly, "God be with you," and stood waiting to be assisted to his huge chair by the fire.

"A great actor," he said, starting in on Drew again. "I would like to have seen him in Ibsen. As the Master Builder. Or the Doctor." Then he said in French, "Did I ever tell you, Anna, of the time Ibsen was with me, shooting pigeons, at the house near Komane-Ostrog?"

The girl shook her head and sat at his feet to listen. She seemed eager, though Crossen didn't doubt she'd heard the same story innumererable times. Papa-Niko's eyes again rested on Crossen, and he said, returning to English, "He is still the idol of American womankind?"

"Who? John Drew? Not any more."

"Eh? Such a handsome one. But he's older now. Who succeeded him?"

"As a matinee idol? Barrymore, I guess."

"Barrymore," he repeated.

Crossen thought of something, and spoke deliberately, watching the old man's eyes, "You should have seen him in a Russian story called Rasputin."

The word seemed to strike Papa-Niko like an electric charge. He grabbed the arms of his chair and tensed forward, his eyes suddenly hardened, focused on Crossen's face. Melikov was there with long strides, one fist doubled, the other hand clenched on the revolver at his waist. But the fire faded from Papa-Niko's eyes and he settled back with the old, glazed look on his face.

"What's the matter?" Crossen asked of Melikov.

Melikov said, "Why did—" He forced his voice to be quiet. "I think he is tired now. Will you bid him good night."

It was a command. Crossen said "Good night," without Papa-Niko seeming to notice, and walked with Melikov to the door.

Melikov snarled, "Did you find out what you wanted?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." And when Melikov laughed bitterly, "You still think I came here to spy on you?"

"Now, I am certain of it."

"You're not very smart, Melikov. You shouldn't spend your time watching me. You should be out watching Kordos. He's probably getting ready to burn you out right now."

"Your Kordos will do nothing without hearing from you."

Melikov called out a command in Russian, and the old guardsman opened the door, his gun ready. There were two others in the hall. One was the Indian boy with a grease-dip lamp, the other a hunched, bowlegged halfbreed armed with an old-time Winchester and an H.B.C. hunting knife.

"I won't cause that much trouble," Crossen said.

Melikov said something more in Russian, the guard saluted, and Crossen was walked on a winding route through rooms and hallways to a new prison room with massive log walls and a floor of solid stone.

He had a brief view of it as he was lighted through the door, then the door thudded shut behind him, and he heard two heavy bars drop in place.

## IX

HE'D GLIMPSED a bunk against one wall. He groped and found it. His side itched a little, but food had restored his strength. He sat for a while, recalling the expression on Papa-Niko's face when the word "Rasputin" was spoken. Rasputin, a monk, an occult healer, a charlatan who'd treated the young Czarevitch Alexis, son of the Czar of Russia, for haemophilia, and was assassinated in a palace plot during the last nightmare months before the Bolsheviks ended things for the royal family in 1918.

The chill of the room slowly made itself felt. There was a bear robe on the couch. He pulled it over him. He had no intention of going to sleep. He drew out

out his pipe and tobacco, but he had no matches. He chewed some of the tobacco. It was very quiet. He could hear only an occasional whisper of feet, or the mutter of a voice outside the door.

He feel asleep. Perhaps he was asleep for an hour. Then he came suddenly awake.

He lay very still, listening, wondering what had awakened him. He put the bear robe aside and stood up. He took a step, and suddenly he knew she was there—Anna.

"Hello!" he said.

Her voice came back, a whisper, unexpectedly close. "Yes."

He groped towards her. She was a slight figure, dressed again in buckskins. His hand closed on her shoulder. He thought for a second she was going to draw away. Then a tremble seemed to pass down her slim body and she stood still, waiting.

"Anna!" He wanted to say something, but it was a thought half formed, and nothing came to his lips. Only her name. She said "Hurry! You'll have to come with me. He'll kill you. Melikov."

"He really means it?"

"Yes. When you mentioned that man, Rasputin. He thought you knew. Perhaps you do know . . ."

"Tell me, girl. Who are you? Who really are you?"

"Isn't it enough that I'm Anna?"

He didn't care who she was, or who Papa-Niko was. He only realized that she was there, the most beautiful girl he'd ever known.

His hands closed on her arms and he drew her towards him. She came willingly. It seemed she'd have fallen without his support, as though her knees had no strength in them. Her hands were tight at the front of his mackinaw. Her head was tilted back. He kissed her again and again. He had no consciousness of time. She might have been in his arms a half minute, a minute, ten minutes. Then she pushed away and said, "No!" like a person awakening. "You have to get out of here."

"All right."

"I have a blanket, some food, a gun. There's a trail up the steep gulch to the west. It will take you over the pass, and down to a river that the Indians call the Miskootya, and after that to the fur company settlement."

"You're coming with me."

"No. No, I can't." She repeated it as though convincing herself that it was impossible. "I have to stay here."

"Why?"

"Because I have to!"

"Because Melikov says you have to? What will you do? Marry an Indian like these white men have married squaws?"

He was holding her too lightly. She gave a little sob of pain and tore away. He reached again, but she was gone in the dark. He could hear the sliding rustle of her moccasined feet across the flagstones.

"Won't that be it?" he whispered fiercely, following her.

"No."

"Why, then?"

"Because of Papa-Niko. He loves me. I'm all he has to live for."

Papa-Niko was a god to her. He'd seen it in her eyes at the table.

He kept walking and almost ran against her in the dark. "Who is he?"

"A Russian. We are all Russians. He led us out during the revolution. We owe our lives to him."

"Russian nobleman?"

"Yes."

"He had something to do with the monk, Rasputin?"

"You guessed that! Yes. He was associated with the Grand Duke in ridding the royal family of him. Papa-Niko said if it hadn't been for Rasputin, perhaps the war would have gone better, perhaps the revolution could have been controlled. But when he died, too much harm had been done. Papa-Niko risked his life going back to see the Czar. He wanted him to escape, to Switzerland. The Czar would not go. He was taken prisoner and executed.

"After that it was death for any Russian nobleman that they found. I had not been born, but my father and mother and a dozen others lived through it. They lived because Papa-Niko led them eastward to Siberia, to Omsk, where General Kolak had set up a counter-revolutionary regime; and when Omsk fell to the Reds, on across the frozen tundras, month after month, until they reached Okhotsk on the Pacific.

"There they hid for months in the house of a merchant named Stein. They were carrying a fortune in jewels. Stein could have bought them passage to America, but Papa-Niko decided against it. At that time the Bolshevik secret police, the Cheka, was operating all over the world. He was afraid that even in America they'd hunt down those who were the Czar's relatives and assassinate them. Then they made the acquaintance of Captain Kablov. He was an adventurer, an aviator, who'd traveled all over the Arctic world. He told of a place in the wilderness of Canada unknown to white men where they could live in safety as long as they wanted. Under Captain Kablov an expedition was fitted out. It left Okhotsk under the Red flag.

"Three weeks later they reached Coronation Gulf. Captain Kablov had a small plane along. He flew the first trip alone and found a landing place four miles from here, along the river. He set up a temporary camp and made more than twenty flights, transporting people and supplies. Then he left, promising to return in the spring. It was the last ever heard of him.

"And they've stayed here ever since!"

"In Siberia, Papa-Niko almost lost his mind. He was very ill. The second spring Count Bakunin started for Montreal, taking some of the royal jewels with him to pay expenses, but he was never heard of again. Perhaps he was found and assassinated by the Cheka. Melikov held a meeting and announced we were leaving for the south—for the United States. I will never forget that meeting. I was a little girl. I was frightened. Papa-Niko spoke and it was the only time I ever saw him angry. He said he would give the command to leave when a command was to be given. He never has. We are still here."

"What will you do when Papa-Niko dies?"

"I don't know. I have never been anywhere but here."

"Haven't you wanted to leave?"

"Maybe," she whispered.

"I still don't know who you are."

"Papa-Niko is my grandfather. My mother died ten years ago. She was the Grand Duchess. My father was Count Bakunin. He left and never came back. The trip, I have heard, is very dangerous and long. He didn't just leave with the gems as some of them try to say!"

"Diamonds?"

"Yes. But not those that Matoos had. Matoos used to live here. He worked a year in the big house, just for the chance to steal those diamonds from Marie Androvna. Melikov knew he had them, and he always feared that some day a jeweler would identify them as royal gems so the Cheka would start tracing them."

"Girl! The Russian government is no longer concerned with the old nobility. There is no longer an army of White Russians, no sentiment to return a Romanoff to a throne. All that is forgotten history. The world—the Russians and everyone—has new problems. Bigger problems. Realize that."

"Aren't diamonds still worth money? Aren't there men in your own country of America who would sell their souls for money?"

"A great many of them."

"Then this man, this Kordos—"

She stopped suddenly. Someone was just outside the door.

## X

THERE WERE a few seconds of utter silence. Then Anna whispered, "Old Kazin! Do you think he heard us?"

"Didn't he let you in?"

"Of course not. I came through the inner door."

He hadn't suspected the existence of a second door. She took his arm and guided him across the dark room. The door was there. She'd opened it barely enough for herself to squeeze through. It wasn't wide enough for him. The door was very heavy. It scraped and creaked as he moved it. He got through, closed it again. She stood near with something in her hands. A heavy wooden bar. She dropped it in place. The old guardsman had just entered the prison room. The glow of his lamp shone through cracks in the plank door. He shouted on finding the room empty.

She ran, leading Crossen down a hall with a dim rectangle of moonlight at the distant end. It was a relief to get outside. from excitement as from exertion. She

They were in the shadow of a snowshed. She was breathing hard, as much

pointed out toward the steep hills of the back country.

"That gulch. You'll find a trail—"

"You're coming with me!"

"No."

The guardsman's shouts were arousing the house. He could hear the thud of running feet.

She said, "Here!" and lifted a pack of bedding and provisions, with one of those Russian rifles thrust through the shoulder thongs.

A man charged around the corner, almost colliding with him. Melikov.

Melikov had a pistol in his hand. He wheeled, fell towards the wall, hitting it with one shoulder. The gun was aimed, he pulled the trigger. The explosion whipped past Crossen's face so closely it blinded him momentarily, but the bullet missed. Anna had struck Melikov's arm, saving his life.

Melikov flung her away. He tried to bring the gun up, but Crossen took a long step and smashed him down with a right to the jaw.

Crossen got the pack, swung it to his shoulder, looked around for the girl. "Anna!" he called.

She was backing away. "Get out while you can."

"You're coming with me."

"No."

He started to follow her, realized she wouldn't come, turned, and ran downhill toward the smaller houses. There he found momentary concealment. A malemute sighted him, commenced barking, fighting his babiche thong. He kept running. The stockade was a couple of hundred steps farther. A gun crashed and he felt the hum of a bullet winging close. A second slug stirred pebbles that stung the backs of his legs.

He reached the stockade. It was ten feet high. He felt for finger and toe holds between the posts. He saw a ladder then. The girl had placed it there for him. A bullet tore splinters as he dropped to the far side. In another quarter-minute he was in the spotty shadow of evergreens.

He found the trail. It took him along the side of a gulch, around a cliff, across loose, jagged slide-rock. In the distance were three spires of stone that resembled human figures with hats on, and the final bit of Matoos' directions was explained. These were the Three Sisters.

The country became more broken, with both sides cut by gorgelike feeder gullies. The trail wound through huge boulders that had tumbled from above.

A ROCK came loose and fell from one level to the next with a series of hard clatters. He looked up and glimpsed bluish gunshine. A man's silhouette sharp against the moonlit cliff. He wore a hat such as Crossen had not seen in the valley. One of Kordos' men! Something in his movement even told him who it was. Jack Marsak. There'd be more of them, all of them. Kordos was waiting his chance to attack.

Crossen kept going. He stopped beneath the shadow of a rock pillar and looked around. Men were coming along the trail from the big house, following him. Kordoes would lie low. He'd wait and try to trap them all. For him, it would be an unexpected piece of good fortune.

He stripped the pack from his shoulders, took out the rifle. It was a heavy gun, big bore, comparable to an old .41 Swiss. A bullet heavy enough to turn a man inside out, but with a range of only a couple-hundred yards. They'd have no chance against Kordos with his advantage of position and his high-velocity rifles.

## TOTEM POLES

*Up beyond Queen Charlotte Sound, near the southeastern tip of Alaska, is the old Bella Bella Indian settlement, which was founded by the Hudson's Bay Company. In front of almost every house in the village—and in other Indian villages in the region—is a grotesquely carved totem pole. These are erected following the death of the individual, and on the pole is carved the genealogy of the deceased. Families having the same crest are forbidden to intermarry; A Frog may not marry a Frog; nor an Eagle an Eagle.*

*Among the totems of the Haida Indians of southeastern Alaska are the eagle, thrasher, whale, crow, wolf, and bear. When a totem pole is erected in front of a native house the figure at the top is the principal symbol of the male occupant Members of a clan whose heraldic symbols are the same are regarded as blood relations, even though they may live hundreds of miles apart and may speak a different language.*

He left the trail and doubled back, crawling over jagged slide rock. The Russians and halfbreeds were closing the distance. He aimed over their heads and pulled the trigger.

The bullet, dropping, fell closer than he'd intended. A couple of the men dived for cover, the others kept on. He shifted his aim and sent three rapid shots into the rocks, high above, where Marsak was lurking.

It had the desired result. Marsak returned the fire, and an instant later Kordos' men were pouring lead down from half a dozen directions.

He stayed down, cheek pressed hard against rock and dirt while bullets screeched over him. The air smelled sulphurous from scorched rock. When the first fusillade spent itself, he inched downhill and reached the narrow bottom of the gulch.

A thin trickle of water ran among the stones. He crossed and recrossed it, moving back toward the settlement. The shooting diminished and picked up again. He cursed, realizing that they'd kept on up the gulch and now Kordos, with his superior guns, was cutting them to pieces.

Crossen cupped his hands, shouted "Get back!" over and over.

It was futile. No one could hear him. All he could do was head for the stockade.

He struggled across rocks that choked the gulch bottom. It was too slow. He started to climb. A bullet hit and glanced like an explosion in his face.

He instinctively plunged to the protection of a rock. His right leg felt numb. He looked at it. No blood. The bullet had missed him. In falling he'd struck it over a sharp edge of stone. After a while, the numbness left and he could move it.

His rifle was gone. It lay six or seven feet away. He tried to reach it, and drew another shot. He lay for half a minute, not daring to move. At the ridge crest, two men came in sight and headed down a spruce-covered shoulder of land toward the big house.

Even at that distance and by moonlight, he could tell that one of them was Kordos.

HE GAVE UP trying to retrieve the rifle. He still had the hunting knife Anna had given him. If he caught up with Kordos in the darkness of the house, perhaps the knife would be just as useful.

He inched back down the slope, feet first, flat on his stomach. He found safety again at the gulch bottom, but it had consumed time. At least five minutes now since he'd glimpsed Kordos and his companion.

There was another quarter mile of slow going, and finally he reached timber at the broadening mouth of the gulch. A trail opened, and he followed it at a swift wolf-trot.

In another half hour, he caught sight of the house. It looked more massive than ever by the pre-dawn gloom. Dark, save for a single rectangle of candlelight at one of the second-story windows.

He kept running as long as his endurance would let him, then the knoll became too steep. He bent forward and climbed hard to the stockade.

He breathed a few seconds, commenced looking for toeholds along the wall. The outer faces of the pickets had been flattened until scarcely a rough spot remained to give even a momentary purchase. He drew his knife and struck the point overhead with all his strength. Then, with one hand clutching the blade, he pulled himself up. The knife came free, and he fell. He did it over again, with the blade at a different angle, brought himself up until his chin was even with the blade, hunted a brief toehold, made a grab, and found the top of the wall. He balanced there, his waist bent over the sharp pickets, while he leaned back for the knife. It took him another quarter-minute to work the point free.

Then he dropped to the ground inside.

He listened a few seconds, watched. Dogs were still barking. Somewhere the frightened babble of squaws. Dawn had grayed out the stars, but there were still great black shadows around the buildings. No movement. He climbed, found cover among the cabins, paused again to watch the big house.

He heard a woman's voice, a cry of terror, suddenly cut off. Then a gun exploded. It exploded again, and then a third time, the reports deadened by thick log walls.

He ran uphill, and once more he was beneath the roof of the snowshed. He found the door he'd escaped from. It would only lead him back to the prison

## 'WAY BACK WHEN—

*Over an ancient land bridge from Alaska to Asia, in prehistoric times, came the hairy mammoth, with great curving tusks; they ranged everywhere over Alaska. The buffalo (bison) followed, then the horse, caribou, and other animals of that age and time. Alaska was then a forested country, with a moderate climate; large fossil trees of that era still remain on what is now tundra, covered with reindeer moss, with a frozen subsoil. The forests stretched up to the shores of the Arctic Ocean; and the elevated shelf along Bering Strait (now submerged) was an enormous level plain covering most of the present area of Bering Sea.*

## FOREIGN TONGUE

*Eskimos do not know the word "Eskimo" which was used for the first time in 1611 by Father Biard in his report to the Jesuit Mission in "New France." The word is said to have originated from the Wabanaki Indian word "eskimantsik," meaning "eaters of raw meat." Among the Cree Indians, south of Hudson's Bay, there is a word, "eskimau," which has the same connotation.*

*The derivation of the word "Aleut" is less certain; although the Chukchi, of northeastern Siberia, have a word, "aliuit" (island dweller), which was possibly applied by the Russians to the population of the newly-discovered chain of islands. Originally, this word doubtless referred to the Eskimos on the small islands in Bering Strait.*

room. He strode on, found a second door, entered, groped through a passageway that finally ended in the big room where he'd eaten dinner the evening before.

Coals still glowed beneath a heavy coating of ash in the fireplace. The dim light revealed no one.

He called, "Anna!" His voice, echoing in the big room, seemed very loud. No answer. He'd expected none.

Last night he'd noticed some stairs farther along the hall. He moved on, groping, and tripped over the bottom step.

He got to one knee and listened. His breathing and pulse were back to normal, and small sounds became discernible. He heard the heavy tone of a man's voice, the thud of running feet. He drew the knife, touched the needle-sharp point. It was a heavy weapon, its blade more than a foot long. He felt better with it in his hand.

He climbed, reached the second story. A door was open, with lamplight streaming from it. He looked in on a room about twenty feet square, its floor and walls covered with the skins of animals—a scene of primitive luxury.

It seemed to be deserted. Then he saw someone on the floor. It was Papa-Niko. Dead, lying on his back. He'd taken two bullets at close range, both near or through the heart.

There'd been three shots. He stood and saw a second body. The old guardsman, huddled against the wall.

He sensed someone at the door and turned. It was a woman. He ran to her. She'd taken a blow alongside the head and her eyes had a staring, stunned look. "Where's Anna?" he asked. He repeated, and said, "Anna! Anna!" trying to make her understand.

Her lips formed words.

"Can't you speak English?"

He knew she could. She'd said something in English at dinner the night before.

She almost fell. He carried her to the bed. There she revived enough to whisper, "They took her. Two men. Took her away. To the canoe dock."

"How do you know where they took her?" He repeated, "How do you know?"

"I heard them say it. Twice."

Crossen left her, went outside, knowing that Kordos wanted him to follow into an ambush.

### XI

HE DIDN'T follow the trail. He cut through timber and reached the river. It was darker there, with the forest closing in. Mist still clung to the water's cold surface. He doubled back until he caught sight of the canoe dock, watched for a while. No movement. No sound except the rush of the river. The bank pitched up steeply, covered with brush and small spruce. He climbed. He was close to the trail now. He threaded his way carefully.

Suddenly the brush ended and he was in the trail.

A man was crouched on one knee, his back turned, a rifle in one hand, its butt

resting on the ground. Odette, the half-breed.

Odette had been expecting him from the other direction. He sensed movement behind him, and whirled. The distance was too great for Crossen to cover. But his knife was drawn, and he flung it.

The heavy blade made a single revolution and smashed itself to the hilt in Odette's chest. Odette had his gun up. He fired as he reeled to his feet. The bullet was wild through the treetops. He fell backward, the rifle bounding a dozen feet away.

Crossen saw Kordos and the girl at the same instant.

She was at one side of the trail, her arms bound to a sapling aspen tree, her mouth gagged. Kordos was just standing, reaching for his gun.

Crossen did not pause after flinging the knife. He sprang across Odette's body, and dived headlong. Kordos tried to retreat and get the rifle up, but Crossen grabbed the barrel. Kordos took two backward steps, then, with a massive swing of his body, tore the gun free and wheeled with a returning motion, driving the steel-shod butt to Crossen's skull.

It was like an explosion back of Crossen's eyes. Instinctively he clinched and held tight while Kordos tried to dislodge him with rib-crushing rights and lefts.

Once before, back in Matoos' cabin, he'd felt Kordos' overpowering strength. He felt it again now. It was inhuman, like the strength of a silvertip bear.

He let go, fell back to the ground, pretending unconsciousness. Kordos reared to his full height, sucking his chest full of air. Then, with a triumphant laugh, he leaped to crush Crossen's skull under his heavy boots.

Crossen twisted over and kicked Kordos' legs from under him. Next instant he was diving for Odette's gun.

Kordos was massive, but he was quick. He hit the ground rolling, came to a crouch, and sprang. The two men collided, but Crossen stayed on his feet. He grabbed for the gun, missed. The bank fell away toward the river. He checked himself at the edge of the canoe float and lashed out with a right to Kordos' jaw.

It was unexpected enough to snap the big man's head to one side, but he didn't retreat. He had a brute's strength and a brute's resistance. He muttered thickly and rushed with both arms outstretched to grapple.

It was the thing Crossen had waited for. He seized Kordos' right arm, pivoted, and using the big man's own momentum, sent him flying over his bent back.

It was a wrestling maneuver common in a hundred villages of the Yellowknives. And there was another trick coupled with it that the Yellowknives used only in a battle to the death. He called on it now, and as Kordos was off his feet, his arm stiffly down, Crossen caught it across his knee, bent as over a falcrum.

He could hear the sharp crack of breaking bone. Kordos screamed from pain as he went down. He rose, arm dangling and useless, located Crossen and charged.

Crossen smashed him to the ground with a right and left. He reeled to his feet and Crossen put him down again. Still he wasn't out. He crawled on hands and knees. He got up, fell, got up again. He retreated. He kept weaving his battered, bloody head. His eyes were glazed, like a pole-axed beef's. He spoke, with his tongue too thick for his mouth. "I'm licked. You got the girl. Here. Take these, too." He dug in his mackinaw pocket. "These stones. They're yours. Maybe twenty thousand dollars worth. Only let me go." They were in a buckskin bag, and when he tried to hand them across, they spilled and lay gleaming on the damp, black earth. "You take 'em all. I'll get out. You'll never see me again . . ."

Suddenly he turned and crashed through the last yards of brush and was back to the trail. He almost tripped over Odette's body. The gun wasn't where he'd expected. But his own rifle lay on the ground, twenty feet away.

He lunged. The gun was in his good hand, but he'd momentarily lost footing. He turned, saving himself by going to a crouch. The gun was angled upward across his thigh. Crossen already had the breed's Winchester. He levered and fired with one swift movement. The bullet smashed Kordos backward. Kordos tried to stand, rifle still in his hands. He fired a bullet that sliced a riffle along the wet cover of twigs and spruce needles. Then the life went out of him and he pitched face forward to

the ground.

CROSSEN walked over and looked at him. The beating had left him dazed. He stood there almost a minute. Then he remembered the girl.

She'd fought one hand free of the babiche thongs and was tearing the gag from her mouth.

He freed her, and she was in his arms a long time before either of them spoke.

"You saw what he did to poor Papa-Niko?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What happened to the others? Our men?"

"I don't know. They were putting up a tough fight. Kordos couldn't have more than five men up there. They'll get along all right."

Indians from the wickiup village had heard the shots and were skulking through the forest to see. A squaw brought them a bowl of bark tea. Crossen drank. A quick strength flooded his body, followed by drowsy fatigue. The wound at his side was hurting again. He lay full length, eyes closed, while the squaws made moss packs and rebandaged it.

Anna said, "Leonid!"

He sat up and grabbed a Winchester. It was her brother, his head bandaged, swift-striding down the path.

Leonid ran to her, lifted her off her feet, and cried something in Russian. Then he put her down and seized Crossen's hand.

"You saved her life!"

"She saved mine."

"Where is he? That big man, that—"

"Dead."

"Ha! I knew he'd lay an ambush, but he was no match for you. When I saw you last night at the table, I said—"

"He was a good enough match for me," Crossen said. "What happened up the gulch?"

"We killed a couple of them. The rest escaped to the back country. Perhaps for reinforcements—"

"Don't worry about that. They won't be back. How many did you lose up there?"

"Kochak, Alex, and two of the half-breeds. We carried Melikov out with a bullet through him."

"He's alive then. I'd like to talk to Melikov."

"No. You can't go back there. Melikov thinks you led us into the ambush. He thinks everyone from outside the valley is an enemy. You're not safe here. You'll have to leave."

Crossen thought about it and said, "All right." He looked at Anna. "I need your canoe."

He remembered the jewels and spent ten minutes hunting them out from among twigs and spruce needles. He counted them. Twenty-four. He let them roll from from one hand to the other a few times, a stream of white, red, and yellow fire. He was wondering how much they'd be worth in Montreal. A small fortune, perhaps. The stake he'd been looking for so long.

He tried to give them to Leonid, but he refused. "They're worth nothing to us here. Keep them. They'll be a little pay for what you've done."

Leonid helped him lower the birch canoe to the water. Anna held it against the current as the two men shook hands. Crossen then stepped in, knelt with a paddle ready. Anna was watching him.

He said, "My side bothers me sometimes. Maybe you could help me upstream."

"Yes," she whispered. An instant later she had the extra paddle. As they cleared the wooded point. Anna looked back and called something to her brother. A Russian word Crossen did not understand, but he knew it was farewell.

"How long will you need me?" she asked.

"To the sulphur water, to the swamps of Nipphauk, to Spirit Lake."

There was a soft smile on her lips as she said, "So far!"

"Yes, and a lot farther. A million miles farther!"

# RETREAT TO SIBERIA

## By BURT M. McCONNELL

**The Pole . . . a glittering objective that a host of Arctic explorers strove for and failed. U. S. Navy Lieutenant De Long's attempt, in 1881, failed too, but the record of the party's harrowing battles against the elements remains as a grim epitaph to brave men.**

IN APRIL, 1881, Lieut. George W. De Long, U. S. Navy, found himself —and his ship, the JEANNETTE,— five hundred miles north of Siberia and drifting ten miles nearer the North Pole each day. To the naval officer and his men, this was not alarming; it was in accordance with a bold and unprecedented plan to drift to the Pole and over the top of the world. Generation after generation of Arctic explorers had fought their way toward this glittering objective by ship, by dog-team, and afoot. And history recorded failure after failure. But the lack of success seemed merely to intensify the determination of this hardy breed to break down the barriers of ice and snow that for centuries had blocked the efforts of their predecessors.

De Long carefully studied the reports of dozens of Arctic expeditions, and decided to try a new tack. He was intrigued by reports that certain trees, indigenous to northern Siberia, had been found among the driftwood of Iceland and Spitsbergen. If, he reasoned, trees could be washed by the spring freshets out of the banks of the Lena River, and carried by the winds and currents over the top of the world, why wouldn't the winds and currents carry a ship over the same course? De Long's theory was that the warm waters of the Japan Current, flowing northward through Bering Strait, would open a way through the drifting ice fields and perhaps to the Pole itself!

In Washington he found support in the Navy and Congress. In New York City he found, in the person of James Gordon Bennett, publisher of the New York *Herald,* the man who had sent an expedition to Africa to find a missionary. Mr. Bennett was wealthy, and he was sufficiently interested in the De Long theory to finance an expedition for proving or disproving that theory. In either case it would be news, and Mr. Bennett was interested in the dissemination of news.

De Long's ship, a bark-rigged steam yacht, was brought from England through the Straits of Magellan to San Francisco. She had been the PANDORA; now she was christened the JEANNETTE. In September, 1879, she was headed into the ice-pack near Herald Island, a hundred miles northeast of Siberia. By January, 1881, they had drifted 1,300 miles - far enough to have reached the Pole had their drift been in a straight line. Actually, however, they were less than 250 miles from the point where they had entered the ice! In that time the ship had been squeezed and jammed by the drifting floes, tossed and tumbled about, nipped and pressed.

She was leaking, but habitable. For a year they had been compelled to keep the pumps going, night and day. But the ice was pressed tightly enough against the ship to hold her up. As for the members of the expedition, they were having fun. Occasionally they would shoot a polar bear, a walrus, or a seal. This fresh meat supplemented their rations, warded off scurvy, and provided food for their dogs and footgear for themselves.

On the evening of June 10th, 1881, their Arctic outing was brought to an end by the sudden pressure of the ice upon the vessel's oaken sides. This raised the JEANNETTE several inches in her icy berth. Soon after midnight of the 11th, the ice opened alongside the ship, completely freeing her, and she floated on an even keel for the first time in months. But this was only a temporary respite. On the morning of the 12th the ice brought tremendous pressure to bear upon the vessel, heeling her over to starboard and

*The tremendous ice pressure heeled the ship over to starboard and split the deck seams.*

bursting open the deck seams.

The ship's boats were lowered onto the ice, and provisions, arms, tents, fuel, sledges, and other equipment for a retreat to the mainland of Siberia were stacked at a safe distance on the floe. There, upon the inhospitable White Desert, five hundred miles from the nearest inhabited land, stood the gallant crew of the JEANNETTE, ready to begin the desperate retreat over the ice which for most of them was to end in death.

Early in the morning of June 13th, the ice pressure was relaxed. Some of the men, in fact, narrowly escaped being precipitated into the frigid depths when the floe on which the camp was pitched split without warning beneath their tent. On June 18th the party left their camp at Lat. 77° 18'N., Long. 153° 23'E.

The castaways consisted of De Long, thirty officers and men, and two Eskimo hunters—thirty-three in all. They took with them five sledges, two cutters, a whaleboat mounted on runners, six tents, 3,500 pounds of pemmican, 1,500 pounds of hard-bread, coffee and tea and other supplies, and twenty-three dogs. The program was for all hands to put on their harness and drag the first cutter along the trail chosen by the Commander and the ice Master of the JEANETTE. When they came to a flag, set a mile or so from camp, they would leave the cutter there, and return for the second cutter. Meanwhile the dogs would have brought the No. 1 sledge to the flag, and would return with the cutter party.

At the No. 2 cutter, the men were divided up, one section dragging the No. 1 sledge and the other the second cutter; the dogs would haul the No. 2 sledge. All these would be hauled up to the flag and left there. (This was a dangerous thing to do, for a crack in the ice might have cut them off from their supplies, but there was no help for it.) They would then all return to the whaleboat and the No. 3 sledge, each section taking over one of these burdens. When all these were grouped together in a place of safety, the party would camp.

JUNE was the worst month of the year for ice travel. The ice was honeycombed by melting snow, rain, and rivulets. The three sturdy boats, with their sledges, weighed almost four tons; and in addition there were almost four tons of food and equipment. The snow was soft and in places knee-deep; the road was rough, and the surface of the ice broken up by cracks and fissures. The party came often to open water, which caused a certain amount of delay while they searched for a suitable ice-cake on which they could ferry over the loaded sledges. When such a ferry was not available, the boats were taken off their sledges and launched.

On the first day of their retreat to Siberia, three of the sledges were damaged by the rough ice and their heavy loads, and had to be unloaded while repairs were made. Frequently, when the runners sank into the soft snow, the combined efforts of the entire party were required to extricate them.

Under such disheartening conditions they averaged less than four miles a day. In order that the party might sleep while the sun was drying their foot-gear, clothing, and tents; and that the men might avoid the reflection of the sun's rays from the snow and ice, they hauled their sledges at night during June and July. Their daily ration was a pound of pemmican; with coffee or tea, sugar, and hard-bread.

At the end of the first week of travel, De Long ascertained from an observation that the ice was drifting NORTHWARD faster than they could travel SOUTHWARD! Fearing that the rank and file might give up hope if they were apprised of the situation, the Commander confided only in his two senior officers.

Day after day they waded through pools of water. Often they were halted by churning floes, it being impossible to travel over the moving floes or to launch the boats. At the end of twenty-five days of travel, during which time they gained about a hundred miles, the party discovered Jeannette Island, Henrietta Island, and Bennett Island. They remained at Bennett Island 22 days, repairing their boats and getting ready to travel the remaining distance to shore through open water. Since their food supplies were running low, and dogs could serve no useful purpose until the party reached shore, they retained the seven best dogs

and shot the others. Seven weeks had passed since they left ship.

For eighteen days they threaded their way southward among the ice floes. Sometimes they made as much as ten miles a day. Often a narrow strip of ice would cut them off from the open water beyond, and they would have to haul out their boats, drag them across the ice, and launch them on the other side. (Here, incidentally, is where an Eskimo UMIAK would have been appreciated; half a dozen men could handle one of these flat-bottomed skiffs. But the party had none of these walrus-hide boats.)

In their two cutters and the whaleboat, they sat for hours in cramped positions. Sometimes, in rough weather, they were obliged to bail continuously to keep from being swamped. When approaching darkness compelled them to haul their boats onto a floe for the night, they would eat their cold rations, and crawl into their sleeping bags, wretched, wet and shivering. Their clothes were in tatters - and all of their dogs except one had become separated from the party during the transfer from ship to floe.

More than once, on their way to the mainland, the explorers were obliged to turn out in the middle of the night by the breaking of their floe. And once they were hemmed in by the ice for ten days. They were living on short rations, winter was at hand, and their supply of fresh water had been ruined by the seas which boarded their frail craft. Still they fought their way toward the Lena Delta, buoyed up by the hope that they would find a settlement. They were now about ten miles from the nearest land. The party had run out of coffee and tobacco, so they drank tea and smoked the tea leaves. While their coffee lasted they had smoked the grounds.

ON SEPT. 10TH they came to an island, and one of the hunters brought down a deer; they had their first full meal in three weeks. De Long now made a permanent division of the party and supplies, and issued instructions to his officers to cover every possible contingency. The first cutter, in charge of the Commander, carried the surgeon and 12 others; the second cutter, skippered by Lieut. Chipp, carried the JEANETTE'S Master and six others; the whaleboat, captained by Chief Engineer (later Rear Admiral) Melville, carried Lieut. Danenhower and nine others. It was the intention, of course, to keep together, but a southeast gale, alternating with a blinding snow-storm, continued unabated for four days; and this was followed by a heavy northeast gale. The sailors, blinded by wind and spray, pulled manfully at the oars, their bare hands frozen, cracked, and bleeding. They were drenched to the skin by the icy seas. The water allowance was one pint per man per day.

During the storm, the sea moved much faster than the whaleboat, so the waves broke over the stern continually, almost swamping the craft. Melville had hauled her closer to the wind, and reefed the sail, in order to reduce her speed to that of the first cutter. When De Long saw that this was impossible, and that the whaleboat could render no aid if one of the cutters should capsize, he waved them on. Far astern, Melville could see the second cutter, battling with the storm. It was his last glimpse of Lieut. Chipp. The second cutter was never heard from again; nor were any bodies or wreckage ever found.

The other two boats continued their separate ways. Melville found a haven in the Lena Delta, made contact with the natives, and organized a search for his companions. By breaking the ice, poling, rowing, and dragging the first cutter for four days, De Long approached to within a mile and a half of shore. Here the cutter ran aground in the darkness.

After vainly waiting for the tide to rise, and endeavoring unsuccessfully to find deeper water, it was decided to unload their cutter and carry their stuff ashore through the icy water. When daylight came, they dragged the boat through the mud to within half a mile of shore and carried their stores and equipment to the beach, sloshing back and forth. They worked until far into the night.

De Long's party was now reduced to five and a half days' rations of pemmican and tea. The nearest settlement, so far as they knew, was almost a hundred miles distant. They were about to enter the labyrinth known as the Lena Delta, but they had no

chart to guide them. They were cold, water-soaked, under-nourished, weak, and generally miserable.

The party built a cache in which to place the log-books of the JEANNETTE, instruments, and personal effects which would have been a burden. Then began the trek that was to end in death by starvation and exposure to all but two members of the party. The Commander was bewildered by the maze of rivers flowing and intermingling on the delta proper. Had he landed thirty miles farther west, he would have struck a village of natives—but he had no way of knowing this. He also passed, unknowingly, within fifteen miles of a cache of twenty reindeer carcasses. There were plenty of ptarmigan in the Delta, but the party had not brought a shotgun.

The men hobbled along with their heavy loads, sometimes breaking through the ice and getting wet to their knees. Whenever driftwood was to be had, they built a fire at night, but often they woke up, shivering with cold. One of them, whose frostbitten toes had been amputated, automatically cut down the speed at which the others could have travelled, so that their average was less than four miles a day. When they were still eighty-five miles from the nearest probable settlement, they found that they had but two days' rations. But their faithful Eskimo hunter gave them a respite by killing two reindeer.

ON SEPT. 26TH, when but one day's ration remained, De Long sent forward two of his strongest men to get relief. It was not until the two messengers had trudged nearly 120 miles that they fell in with Siberian natives. These people were kind and considerate; they could appreciate that the strangers were half-starved. But the two white men could not make themselves understood. All they could do was to write a note, place it in the hands of a native, and hope that it would be delivered to some Russian official who could read English.

Meanwhile, De Long and his men kept plodding southward. They followed the west bank of the river until it forked, then they crossed on the ice. Providentially, one of the Eskimos killed another reindeer; they were saved again! By October 3rd, however, they had consumed their last bit of pemmican. There remained their one dog, and the Commander ordered him shot and a meal prepared. They had been fond of the dog, but they ate the stew without quibbling. The battle for survival was going against them, and they knew it. They were lost among a hundred streams, all flowing to the sea. Cold and wet, with a northwest wind blowing, the group spent a wretched night. Erickson, whose toes had been amputated, groaned and rambled on incoherently until daybreak, making it impossible for the others to sleep. They had no driftwood, so they could neither warm themselves nor dry their clothes and footgear. The temperature was below zero.

Three days later Erickson died. They were too feeble to dig up the frozen ground—even if they had had tools. So they sewed up the body in the flap of the tent, wrapped it in a flag, and buried it through a hole in the ice. De Long's diary for the day concludes: "Supper at five. Half a pound of dogmeat (apiece) and tea." But the next day one of the Eskimo hunters secured a ptarmigan (which weighed about a pound), and they made soup for the entire party! In addition, they ate strips from their skin clothing, and washed them down with tea made from willow shoots.

For the next two days their rations consisted of an ounce of alcohol in a pint of hot water; this seemed to allay their craving for food. Then came a blizzard which lasted two days, and confined them to their camp on the river bank. They had no wood, and there was no game in the vicinity except ptarmigan. When these were obtained, they were cooked—entrails and all—to make soup. Once the Eskimo hunters brought in three, and they eked out the meal with a spoonful of sweet oil and a few scraps of deerskin. They were growing weaker each day. In fact, they were now too feeble to make their way against the blizzard, yet De Long realized that staying there might mean death by freezing and starvation. They struggled on toward the south and civilization.

On October 4th they obtained another ptarmigan and made soup. The next day they had two old boots and willow tea. At this stage, two of the men broke down

completely, and could go no farther. One of these men was an Eskimo hunter, and his death definitely cut down their chances of surviving. Too weak to bury him, they laid his body on the frozen surface of the river, and covered it with snow and slabs of ice. Four days later, two other members of the party died. The bodies were carried out of their temporary haven—an empty grain raft and a tent—and laid on the ground; the survivors were too weak to carry them out onto the ice.

On October 28th, one man died; and on the 29th another. The last entry in the De Long diary reads: "October 30th. Boyd and Gortz died during the night; Collins dying."

From October 9th to the 30th, the party had traveled exactly 18 miles—less than a mile a day. Now only three were left: De Long, the surgeon, and the Chinese cook. It is generally believed that they all died within the next two days.

MEANWHILE, Melville and his party had not been idle. And they had suffered more than their share of hardships. On landing, the men tried to walk, but their feet and legs were without feeling. Four days in the cold, wet confines of the whaleboat had robbed them of their vitality. The harrowing experience in the gale had produced a dullness of mind, of movement, and of speech among the whole party. Their flesh was sodden and spongy to the touch, as if they were afflicted with scurvy.

They built a fire to dry their clothing and footgear. Only then did the after-effects of frostbite become apparent. It was as if millions of needles were being thrust into their feet, hands, and legs. For almost four weeks they had been hungry, wet, and cold. They were still hungry, but they were warm and dry.

The next morning they proceeded upstream, making approximately thirty miles, yet they saw neither natives nor occupied huts. They landed for the night, and built another fire. Their clothing was worn out, and they repaired it by sewing patch on patch. The flesh had wasted away from one man's frost-bitten toes, exposing the bones. Gangrene apparently had set in, and if the afflicted one's attendant neglected for a day to pare away the dead tissue with his hunting knife, the odor became unbearable.

On Sept. 18th, Melville was visited by three friendly natives. He and his men were on reduced rations at the time, and the natives brought them some fish. But the natives could not be persuaded to pilot the Melville party through the labyrinth to Belun, the nearest settlement of any size; the ice, they said in the sign language, would not bear their weight, yet it was thick enough to hamper the boats. Melville would have to wait. Had the expedition used the skin-covered *umiaks;* had they delayed their retreat to shore until the freeze-up; had they owned a chart of the Lena Delta, with its two hundred streams—any one of these might have meant the difference between tragedy and success. As it was, twenty men, including the Commander, perished.

Knowing that, in the circumstances, the U. S. Government would horfor any draft, Melville obtained dog-teams, drivers, and food for men and dogs. He then set out to make contact with the De Long party, on the assumption that they had been successful in reaching shore and finding natives. Someone heard of his presence in the Delta, and brought him a note from De Long's two messengers.

Melville belonged in a hospital at the time. His feet and legs were swollen to nearly double their normal size. A veritable gale was blowing across the trail to Belun. Drifting snow almost obscured the leading dogs. But he managed to find the hut where the messengers were staying. Long ago they had given up the whaleboat party for lost; now they stared at him, in the dim light of the hut, as if he had risen from the dead. Tears came to the eyes of all three Navy veterans as they met. Until then, Melville had believed that De Long and his men were in good health and safe in some settlement. The two messengers, under the care of the villagers, had partly recuperated from their fasting ordeal, and were of considerable assistance to Melville. At Belun, Melville was handed a document signed by De Long; a native had brought it from a village to the eastward. It told the story of the De Long cache.

Obtaining more food for his dogs and men, Melville, using the document as a

guide, came at last to the cache, and brought away the most important logbooks and equipment. With the aid of the two messengers, he traced the laborious retreat of the De Long party by the huts at which they had stayed. At that season of the year, Melville had but four hours of daylight in which to prosecute the search. Blizzards and gales kept them indoors for days at a time. Food was scarce in the Delta; all they could obtain for themselves and their dogs was raw frozen fish. The drivers were reluctant to travel in stormy weather; and the native dogs lay down and whined when the going got rough. The leader of the search party himself was unable to walk, and had to be carried on one of the sleds. But he never faltered in the quest.

After several unsuccessful attempts to pick up and follow De Long's trail from the north, Melville tried retracing the trail of the two messengers from the south. After visiting a number of places, and travelling a total of more than 650 miles in the search, he came to a spot where a large fire had been made. De Long had said he would follow the west bank of the river in his retreat. The two messengers also assured Melville that De Long intended to follow the west bank—and this was the EAST bank. However, here were definite indications of the lost explorers. The party began a thorough search in the immediate vicinity.

MELVILLE himself went to the north, and soon he noticed the tops of four poles sticking up through the deep snow. They were lashed together; and hanging from them was a rifle. He set the natives to digging through the 8-ft. layer of snow, while he and one of the messengers, accompanied by a native, continued along the river bank. Here the snow was not so deep. At a spot about 500 yards from the poles he saw a tea-kettle, blackened by many fires, outlined against the snow. Melville was about to stoop and pick up the kettle when he saw, almost at his feet, A FROZEN HAND AND ARM STICKING OUT OF THE SNOW! His native companion started back in terror, crossed himself, and muttered a prayer. Melville himself knelt in the snow; he could see that it was the body of De Long by the coat he wore.

There were two other objects, covered by the snow, and they proved to be the bodies of the surgeon and the Chinese cook; the other bodies were discovered a day or two later. Melville lost no time in dispatching a messenger by dog-team to the nearest telegraph office, with a report to the Secretary of the Navy. Then, day after day, barely able to hold a pen in his frost-bitten fingers, he worked in the smoke-filled hut, copying De Long's diary.

The diary revealed that at night, on every possible occasion, De Long had built a huge bonfire, in the hope that a searching party or a native would see it. A comparison of his tortuous wanderings with those of Melville, and a check-up with the native population, revealed the fact that at the time of his death there was not a human being within a hundred miles. All of the De Long party except three were dead on October 30th—the day on which Melville started for Belun in response to a note from one of the messengers. During his subsequent search, which lasted twelve days, Melville could not have found a single member of the party alive.

Now that the search was over, there remained the sad duty of burying the dead. The earth was frozen too hard and too deep to be excavated, so Melville followed the native custom of surface interment beyond the reach of the spring floods. He chose a bold promontory overlooking the Arctic Ocean, holding it altogether fitting that this was where they should rest.

Melville first made a huge cross, twenty-five feet high, which could be seen at a distance of fifteen miles. There was a flat-boat on the river bank, with rough-hewn planks seven inches thick. His men tore the boat apart, and used the planks to make a coffin seven feet wide and twenty-two feet long—large enough to hold all the bodies, laid side by side. There, in the awful silence of that vasts, white expanse, with no requiem but the howling of the storm, they tenderly laid their dead comrades to rest, near the scene of their suffering, where their only winding sheet would be the everlasting snows.

# DEVIL DOG

## By JOSEPH F. HOOK

**Two hundred dollars worth of pure, mean Devil. That's what dog-wise freight haulers claimed when young Pyle purchased Savage, the killer husky bred for murder.**

OBLIVIOUS of the Alaskan mine superintendent's troubled scrutiny, young Curly Pyle continued carrying the heavy gold pokes from the office safe to the waiting sled, with a cheery whistle on his lips. Stray red curls peeped from beneath his muskrat cap as he took long strides through the deep snow.

Some off-shift miners had gathered around the sled, and there was a serious expression in their eyes, which matched that of the superintendent. Each time Curly emerged from the office their conversation ceased abruptly, and was not resumed until he had disappeared inside for another load.

The loading completed, Curly said, "Well, Mister Matterson, I'm all set."

"Just a word before you go, Curly," the superintendent volunteered. "When you underbid Pete Framboise and secured this freighting contract, you made an enemy that it'll pay you to watch closely. I——"

There arose a bedlam of barks and growls and the bellowing voice of a man raised in anger. The superintendent reached the office window in a stride. Curly, right behind him, shuddered at what he saw.

Another dog team had pulled up alongside his own. The leader, a husky named Savage, was the largest and most intelli-

gent dog Curly had ever seen in that district. Whipping it unmercifully was Pete Framboise, a stocky, powerful man, with black eyes and beard. His high cheek bones and broad face attested to the mixture of white and Indian blood coursing through his veins.

Tufts of hair shot up from Savage's back as the long lash struck home. Suddenly the huge husky leaped at its tormentor's throat, only to me met by the shot-loaded whipstock squarely on the nose and beaten back on its haunches. White fangs bared, Savage picked himself up off the snow and leaped again. This time, however, the canny breed had stepped backward, and when Savage lunged the traces tightened, jerking him over on his back.

The miners remained out of reach of the snarling husky and the hissing whip, the expressions on their rugged faces registering disgust at this wanton exhibition. Back went the long lash over the breed's head, then sang forward and down, and more hair shot upward.

Curly rushed to the door, uncoiling his own whip. The superintendent called after him, "Come back, Curly! That husky will——" He paused a moment as his son, a youngster of twelve, dashed past. "Billy!" he shouted. "Billy, you keep out of this! You hear me?"

But the lad paid no attention to him. He threw himself upon the big husky, wrapping his arms around its neck. Blood dripped from the leader's nose, crimsoning the sharp fangs, trickling on to Billy's mackinaw. The lad glared at Framboise with tears in his eyes.

"You let Savage alone, you-you beast!" he sobbed.

The scuffing of Curly's snowshoes stilled the retort on the breed's lips. He whirled, eyes blazing with cruelty. The long lash flicked out, striking Curly across the face, leaving a welt extending from ear to chin.

"So that's the game, huh?" Curly gritted, wincing. "We'll, two can play at that, mister."

"Curly!" the superintendent yelled warningly.

But the young freighter's whip was already in play, the long lash cracking like a pistol in the sub zero air, the rawhide snapper darting around the breed's head and shoulders like a living thing, drawing a grunt of pain at each contact.

Framboise suddenly grabbed his whip by the loaded stock and rushed, shielding his face with the other arm. Curly sidestepped the rush. Back and forward shot his whip arm, and the lash coiled around the attacker's neck.

The breed dropped his whip with a strangled cry. His mouth flew open and his tongue protruded, as Curly kept tension on the throttling lash. Framboise tore at the coils, trying to loosen them so that he could breath.

"Had enough?" Curly asked grimly, slackening the lash.

FRAMBOISE ripped the coils loose and sucked in air with a sobbing sound. He stood facing Curly, glowering at him, fighting to recover his breath. Savage lunged to the limit of his traces, dragging the boy Billy and the rest of the team and sled after him in an effort to slash Framboise. But the kid hung on to the snarling husky, talking to him, trying to quiet him.

"Had enough?" Curly repeated.

"Yeah, I—I guess I have—for now, keed," Framboise gasped. He stooped over slowly, retrieved his whip and stepped closer to Curly. "Pretty smart keed, huh?" he added, tenderly massaging his throat. "A pretty good scrapper with a whip, no? I wonder if you're as good with——"

Then he leaped in, striking viciously with the loaded whipstock. Curly evaded the blow and lashed out with a fist. It cracked dully against Framboise's unprotected jaw, and he fell flat on his face.

The worried superintendent said, "You'd better start mushing, Curly. I wouldn't have had this happen for anything."

"He started it," Curly argued stubbornly, "and I'm finishing it."

The breed rose slowly, unsteadily, to his feet. He passed the back of a hand across his lips, looked at the blood on it, then at the young freighter standing menacingly over him.

"Smack him down again, Curly, and put the boots to him," a miner urged.

"That ain't the way I fight," Curly said doggedly.

The breed glared around at the unfriendly faces, then said to Curly, "Hokay, keed," and started walking away. "Mebbe

we meet again some day, no? But yes! Some day when your frien's ain't aroun'."

"Hold on, Framboise," Curly checked him. "I'm not through with you yet. You're not torturing that husky any more. You're selling it to me. Name your price."

The superintendent grabbed the freighter's arm. "Forget it, Curly," he warned. "That dog's a wild fiend. Framboise made him that way. No man dare go near him, much less tame him. He'd be dear as a gift."

Curly glanced at the snarling husky and Billy, who was still clinging desperately to its collar, and demanded, "Then how do you account for that?"

"I've given up trying to," the superintendent replied. "There doesn't seem to be any logical explanation other than the fact that the dog just took to him."

"Meestair Matterson," the breed interposed, "please to keep the nose out of my beezness." Then to Curly, "Because you can drive a team you t'ink you savvy dogs, no? Hokay, then. Savage, he is yours. Mebbe you lak Billee here. Mebbe Savage luff you too. Yes, he's yours, for two hundred dollair—an' your lead dog to boot."

"You think I'd trade off one of my dogs to you, to torture the way you do Savage?" Curly asked contemptuously. "Two hundred is all you'll get, and it's what you'll take."

Framboise's eyelids narrowed to slits. He studied Curly for long, silent moments, face muscle twitching, blood oozing from clenched lips and crimsoning his matted beard. Then his eyes widened, and there was a cunning expression in them.

He said, "Hokay, keed, you've bought a dog. Fork over the dollairs."

"I haven't that much with me, Framboise, but I'll have it when I return from Suntana, tomorrow."

"Hokay, keed. An' be sure it is tomorrow, 'Cause mebbe you not be aroun' day after tomorrow. Life, keed, is ver' uncertain when you own a dog lak Savage. Savvy?"

"Sure I savvy, Framboise. But as long as I own Savage I'll be in no danger. What you ought to be worrying about now is what will happen to you if Savage ever catches you with your guard down."

"Hokay, keed, I'll start worrying," Framboise said with a derisive laugh.

Curly unhitched his leader and asked a miner to take care of the dog until his return from Suntana. Framboise watched the young freighter approach Savage with diabolical interest in his pig eyes. The mine superintendent clenched his fingers and said, "For God's sake, Curly, be careful!"

The hair lifted along the big husky's spine, and its lips curled back from those long, white fangs. A deep growl issued from its throat, and its ears flattened against its skull.

"Don't come any nearer, Curly!" Billy cried out. "He'll slash you! I'll switch harnesses and hitch him in the lead of your team."

"Haw!" the breed laughed, and bowed mockingly. "Behol' the great dog-tamer. Two hundred dollairs' worth of devil. Haw!"

The transfer of leaders accomplished, Curly shouted, "Mush!" The long whiplash cracked sharply above the dogs' backs. "Mush, Savage!"

The big husky lunged against the breast strap, and away sped the team, snow-spume pluming back from the screeching sled runners.

The pace set was terrific, and soon Curly's long legs began to tire. He rode a runner then, hoping to slow down the leader and, at the same time, save his own and the other dogs' strength. But Savage only redoubled his efforts, never once slackening pace until the railhead at Suntana came into view.

Curly halted the team outside the express office. The clerk emerged, and stopped dead in his tracks when he recognized the great leader. "Don't tell me you bought that—that hairy fiend!" he gasped.

"I sure did," Curly grinned. "For two hundred bucks."

The clerk circled the leader warily. "That," he observed dryly, "is the first time I ever heard of a guy paying two hundred bucks for his own death warrant."

The gold pokes unloaded and locked away in the express company's safe, Curly mushed the team to the public kennels. Time and again he tried to unhitch Savage, and each time the husky flew at his throat. In the meantime, a small crowd

of idle sourdoughs had gathered around to watch, each offering advice, to all of which Curly turned a deaf ear.

It was then that he realized there was but one way to handle the husky for the present. Accordingly, he stepped back and shot the long whiplash at the dog's throat. As with Framboise, it coiled tightly around Savage's neck, shutting off his wind instantly. Even then, with tongue lolling and lungs laboring, the dog tried frantically to fang him.

At last, chained to a stake, Savage lay stretched out on the snow, gasping. Curly quickly unfastened the harness and lash coils, and jumped back.

"Sorry, old boy," he said, "but I just had to do it. One of these days, though, you and me are going to be real pards."

He fed the rest of the team, then stood as near to Savage as he dared. tossing him chunks of smoked salmon. Sometimes, he took a tentative step closer, talking soothingly to the dog, holding out a tempting piece of fish, then leaped back when the husky crouched with flattened ears and raised hackle.

WHEN the team pulled into the mining camp next day, Billy Matterson was on hand. So was Pete Framboise. And while Curly was silently handing over the promised two hundred dollars, Bill was unhitching and unharnessing the dog no man in that district dare touch.

"I'll feed him, Curly, and hook him up in the morning," Billy offered eagerly.

Curly scratched his head thoughtfully even while watching the vicious Savage worrying the kid's hand between those glistening white fangs with the gentleness of a kitten.

"I dunno, Billy," Curly said at last. "How'm I ever going to tame him if I let you handle him at this end of the trip? I got to tame him sometime, somehow, kid."

"Aw, Curly, lemme," Billy pleaded.

"Oh, all right," Curly finally conceded. "Reckon it'll take me just that much longer, though."

"Haw!" Framboise laughed sarcastically. "Some trainer!" Then he yelled at his dogs, "Mush!" The long whip flicked a tuft of hair from the back of his new leader, and the dog's answering howl of pain mingled with the breed's cruel laughter.

Two weeks went by and, as far as Curly could see, the chasm, between Savage and he, was as wide as before. Curly was heartsick. There was, however, one consoling thought—the knowledge that the choking of the dog was as nothing compared to Pete Framboise's sadistic beatings.

The thought was uppermost in his mind that morning, as the team started on the return trip to the mining camp. The air was strangely and unusually warm for that time of the year in Alaska. The dogs were padding along listlessly, lacking their usuel zip. Even the mighty Savage was barely pulling his share of the freight-laden sled.

Then, suddenly, the overcast sky darkened. A chill wind swept down from the mountains, and big flakes of snow began falling. Within a short space of time, Curly and the team were the center of a maelstrom of snow, walled inside a gray world as the storm reached blizzard proportions.

The team slowed to a walk, then stopped. Six of the huskies scooped holes in the snow and flopped into them for protection. Only the great Savage stood there, looking back, watching Curly's every move with baleful eyes.

Curly tried to urge the reluctant dogs to their feet. The long whip hissed and snapped above their backs, but the sound of it and his voice was muted by the roaring gale. He turned then, with his back to the storm, gazing back along the trail in indecision. During the short time he stood thus the sled's tracks had been almost obliterated.

A final decision arrived at, he turned back to his dogs. With widening eyes, he stared at the spot where Savage had been standing only a few moments ago. All he saw were the two neatly fang-snipped traces.

The sinister discovery stunned him. Then he began tossing the freight into the drifts forming alongside the trail. He yanked the dogs out of their holes by main strength, grasped the gee-pole and swung the sled around until it pointed in the direction of Savage's disappearing tracks, along a little used by-trail stemming from the main one.

## SEALING

*Five kinds of seal live in the Arctic, all of the hair-seal variety. The largest of these is the ugruk (bearded seal) which may weigh from 600 to 800 pounds. The netsek is a small, common seal, silvery grey in color. Then there are the kasigeak, the magummnisok, and the little black hair-seal with white spots. All of these belong to the cold waters of the North, and most of them inhabit the Arctic Ocean and Bering Sea.*

*When a seal is killed by a rifle shot while in the water it sinks to the bottom (in the warm months) unless it is immediately recovered by the hunter. There the sea lice begin to feast upon it, and if the carcass is not brought to the surface without delay, by the use of a pair of grappling hooks, it soon becomes a skeleton.*

"Mush!" Curly yelled.

Leaderless, the team started jerkily, running slowly, uncertainly. For what seemed like endless hours to Curly, the dogs kept going, while blizzard, now on their quarter, lashed at them impotently.

Presently, they stopped and gave tongue to a chorus of barks. Curly stared ahead of their pointing noses, seeing nothing through the maelstrom of snow. Then, for a brief moment, the gray pall lifted, dimly revealing the outlines of a log cabin. Before the pall dropped again, the door opened and the figure of a man appeared.

Curly ran blindly forward, to warn the man that a vicious dog was abroad in the land. But while he was still yards away, a scream of terror soared piercingly above the blizzard's roar, followed by strange guttural sounds, then halted abruptly, staring. Lying within the circle of light, cast by a sputtering wall lamp, was Pete Framboise. In the center of the cabin, with one leg chained to the heavy iron stove, was Billy Matterson, the mine superintendent's son. whimpering in stark terror. Crouched beside him was Savage, with crimson fangs bared.

"What're you doing here, Billy?" Curly asked in surprise.

"Pete brought me here," the boy sobbed. "Being Saturday, I was out setting rabbit snares, and—and he came along and tied me up and threw me on his sled. Said he was going to take me somewheres, after the blizzard let up, and kill me, to—to get even with dad for letting you have the freighting contract. And he said, given time, Savage would kill you and save him the trouble of doing it. But ol' Savage got him when he opened the door to see if the blizzard was letting up."

Curly moved toward the boy, but a throaty growl from Savage checked him. Keeping a wary eye on the dog, the freighter shucked his mittens.

"Keep a good, tight hold of his harness, kid," Curly instructed Billy, "while I get that chain off your leg."

"But what you going to do with Savage now, Curly?" the kid anxiously inquired. "He's a killer."

"Do with him?" Curly repeated, scratching his head thoughtfully. "Why, the dog ain't done anything except get even for all them cruel lickings, I reckon. Pete's to blame for making a killer of him. I told him Savage would catch him off guard some day and fix him."

He stepped in behind the kid, his every move watched by the crouching husky, and tested the padlock fastening the chain links around the boy's ankle.

"Just hang on to him, Billy," he said, "while I go over to Pete and get the key out of his pocket. Then we'll beat it back to camp as fast as we can go before your dad's got the miners looking for you in this blizzard."

"But what you going to do about Savage, Curly?" the kid insisted.

"Well," the freighter replied, "the way I look at it, if Pete could teach him to kill, by being cruel to him, you and me can teach him to be gentle, by being kind to him. It'll take time though, Billy—lotsa time. But, I reckon, Savage is well worth it."

"I'll tell the world he is!" Billy cried, and buried his wet face in the husky's thick hair.

# LEVEQUE'S WIFE

## By DAMON KNIGHT

**Marie was a weird tigress. A silent, slinking woman of hate, who waited twelve long, bitter cold years for this day . . . the day she'd bury Leveque 'neath a mountainful of avalanche snow.**

ONCE he was beyond the nastiest stretch of trail, Dr. Harold Reinhardt paused, shifted his pack, and turned away from the wind that was beginning to blow down the mountain. Down the way he had come, sunlight glanced off the dry, powdery snow in splinters of brilliance. Even through his dark glasses, the mountainside was a single blinding sheet of white fire ending abruptly where the early-morning shadows from the range to eastward wrapped it in cool blue-violet.

He was breathing heavily. Getting older, he reminded himself. Twice a year he made this trip, and each time it seemed to him that the climb was a little stiffer, the ridge trail a little narrower and more treacherous. Especially that one place back there, where the slopes dropped breathtakingly away on either side—a mile to the bottom, either way you fell. Enough to give a man acrophobia.

He turned, a bulky, wide-shouldered figure against the snow, and plodded up the last ascent. He could see the smoke from Leveque's cabin before he reached the top. Good; that meant Leveque was home. Sometimes he wasn't. Sometimes, even in weather like this, the crazy Canuck would take his wife and kid down below timberline on week-long hunting trips. Unpredictable, that one, but perfectly suited to this wild country. Reinhardt had a suspicion that he'd picked this place for his cabin, not only because he could spot game from it thirty miles away, but because it was so hard for any lesser man to reach.

He topped the rise, and saw the dark timbers of the cabin a hundred yards away. The cabin was built on the roughly oval, half-acre stretch that formed the sheared-off top of the mountain. This was Leveque's own private domain—population: Leveque himself, his eleven-year-old son Philip, and his wife, Marie.

The door opened and Leveque stepped out on the porch dressed in canvas pants and a dark shirt, open at the neck. Reinhardt saw a puff of steam blur his face an instant before he heard the shout: "Doc!"

Reinhardt called back, "Hello, Leveque."

"I watch for you two weeks now," the other shouted. "I begin to think something happen to you!"

"Don't worry," Reinhardt called, "I'll probably outlive your whole family."

Leveque laughed delightedly. "Same old Doc!" he roared. "You always have your joke, eh? Come on, man, hurry up. Remember, we don' see you for six months."

Reinhardt stepped up on the porch and took Leveque's brown hand. The trapper gave him a white-toothed grin. "Philip!" he called. "Come out, Doc is here!"

There was no answer, and the doorway remained empty. Leveque looked unhappy.

"That woman, she tell him not to come," he said. "Doc, sometime I think she hate me, hate everybody." Then he shrugged his wide shoulders and grinned again. "But I don' bother you with my trouble, eh, Doc? We take a drink together an' forget it, eh?"

Reinhardt was still a little winded from the climb. He did not reply. He took off his snowshoes and leaned them against the wall with the others. Leveque threw an arm around his shoulders and led him inside. "Philip, Marie!" he called.

Sunlight blazed in the two small windows at the front of the cabin, but the rear of the low-ceilinged room was shadowy. It was a long minute before Reinhardt's dazzled eyes could make out the doorway, and the two people standing there.

Marie Leveque stood motionless in the narrow opening, with her arm about the

FIVE

slight, tow-headed figure of her son. Neither spoke.

"Well," said Leveque heartily, "what you say, eh?"

Philip glanced up at his mother, then said, "Hello, Doc."

REINHARDT answered him automatically, his eyes on Marie as she came forward. Like himself, she'd aged noticeably in these last five years. There were tired lines at the corners of her mouth, and her great eyes were shadowed. But she's still beautiful, he thought. Not to some people, I suppose, but beautiful to me. And it's been twelve years this month—a long time.

He said, "Bon jour, Marie."

She came forward and took his hand listlessly, but did not speak. Her expression was unreadable. After a moment she walked over to a rawhide-bottomed chair and sat down, the child standing beside her. Two pairs of dark eyes stared at Reinhardt from across the room.

Leveque, bustling about, helped Reinhardt off with his coat and boots and pushed him into a chair near the fireplace, then disappeared into the doorway that led to bedroom and kitchen.

Reinhardt opened his mouth to speak to Marie again, then shut it. It was no use; she wouldn't answer him. It was hard to remember that, even after twelve years.

He looked away from her steady, emotionless gaze and glanced around the room. A bearskin on the wall—big one. That was new. Leveque must have shot it this fall. Fresh knife-scars on the door-frame. There was the usual pile of books and pamphlets on the table near Reinhardt. Home-medicine guide, Morse code handbook, mail-order catalogues, a couple of novels. For a North country man, Leveque was well read.

The trapper was back in a moment with a quart bottle of his white whisky. He sat down across the crude table from Reinhardt, poured two glasses a quarter full and shoved one at the doctor.

"Drink up, Doc. Well, how you been, eh? No good for any of us if the doctor get sick!"

"I manage to keep my health," said Reinhardt. "No thanks to people who live on the tops of mountains."

Leveque roared with laughter. "Doc, you're a funny man. Some day I gonna cut your throat, I swear!"

Marie pursed her lips and began to whistle. The sound was startling, coming from that impassive face.

Leveque said loudly, "You drink up, Doc, warm up your bones, an' then you can look us over." He drank half the whisky in a gulp, wiped his lips and grinned at Reinhardt. "Me—you know me, I'm never sick. But Marie—" he shook his head, still grinning. "I don' think she feel so good. You know, Doc, she don' say a word to me all day?"

Marie went on whistling. Reinhardt tried to identify the tune, but couldn't.

Leveque didn't look at her. He said, "Marie, she's not much for talk. That's a fine thing, ain't it, Doc, when a man's own wife don't talk to him?"

Reinhardt said, "We all have our crosses to bear, Leveque." He stared at the man from under his shaggy brows. Leveque finished his whisky, set the glass down with a bang, and filled it again. His face was flushed, the eyes feverish, with something like desperation in them.

"Doc," he said in a lower tone, "something got to be done. Marie, she's gettin' worse, you un'erstan'? Yesterday she try to stick me with a knife."

Reinhardt said, "I wanted to take her away long ago."

"Sure," said Leveque, "Sure, Doc. But she wouldn' go. She's nuts about our kid, you know that. You tol' me then, if she want to stay, let her stay. Better for her up here, with me an' the kid. But now, I'm not so sure you' right. What you think now, Doc? You can speak plain. She still don' know only a few words of English."

Reinhardt said, "I haven't changed my mind."

The trapper nodded, poured more whisky. His black hair was falling over his thin, high-cheekboned face. He put his chin in his hands, hunching his powerful shoulders. "Jus' the same, Doc, she gonna kill me some day. Tell me, what you do if you know this is maybe you' last day

on earth, eh?"

"Get drunk, I suppose," Reinhardt said. He sipped his whisky.

Marie was still whistling, tunelessly now, a series of short sounds rising and falling without any apparent pattern.

The flush mounted to Leveque's forehead. He whirled on her, trembling. "Name of God!" he said in French. "Shut the mouth, woman!"

Marie stopped and looked at him expressionlessly.

Philip spoke up timidly. "She wants to know what you talk about, Papa," he said. "Shall I tell her?"

"No!" said Leveque. He caught himself with an effort. "Go play in the kitchen, Philip."

The child looked at him, then at his mother, and went silently out. Marie watched him go without a word.

"All day she whistle, whistle," said Leveque. "How you like to live in a house with that whistle, day in, day out, eh?" He drank and poured again.

"You're a strong man, Leveque," said Reinhardt. "You should be able to stand it."

Leveque looked at him silently, and the pain in his eyes was brighter. Reinhardt felt a sudden twinge of pity; he was a little sorry he had said that.

He rose and picked up his pack, set it down on the table and opened it. "Well, I'd better get at my chores," he said. Then, in French, "Is it that you wish me to examine you now, Marie?"

She glanced at the medical kit in his hand, and nodded. Reinhardt pulled a chair over beside her. Leveque picked up his glass and followed. His speech was a little thick. He must have been drinking for some time before I got here, Reinhardt thought.

"Sometimes," said Leveque, "you know, Doc, eh? I think to die, that's the only way out of man's trouble. Sure. A man live on, he do anything—no good. But he die—all finished, over. No more worry. What you think about that, Marie?"

SHE stared back at him and began the same tune she had been whistling before. Reinhardt recognized it now. It was a popular song. "Murder, He Says." She must have heard it on the radio.

Reinhardt opened his kit carefully and spread it out on his knees. Marie's expressionless face turned toward it, and he saw that she was looking at the row of scalpels, shining in their cloth loops.

Leveque lowered his head and saw them in the next instant. "Mon Dieu, you fool," he shouted. "Don' let her get at those!" He reached out a long arm, but Marie was quicker. In one swift motion she snatched one of the razor-sharp knives from the kit, leaped to her feet, and struck at Leveque's throat.

Drunk as he was, Leveque was fast on his feet. He ducked back, and the knife, instead of slitting his jugular, laid open his forehead in a long gash straight through the eyebrows.

Leveque bled like a pig. He staggered back, wiping at the blood that filled his eyes, cursing hysterically. Marie looked at Reinhardt; then, when he did not move, she slipped around the table, picked up two fur-lined coats from the rack, and went quietly out the back way. Through the window, Reinhardt saw her on the porch a moment later, tying on a pair of snowshoes. Philip was with her. Then they were gone.

Reinhardt forced Leveque into a chair, wiped the blood away from his eyes with a piece of cotton, and gave it to the man to hold over them while he examined the cut.

"Where is that devil?" panted Leveque. "Did she go? Did you let her escape?"

"Hold still," said Reinhardt. "She went outside."

"Ah, non! We mus' catch her, Doc, you un'erstan'? Hurry, can't you?" He tried to get up.

"Sit down, you idiot," Reinhardt said. "You can't go anywhere, bleeding like that. I'll use clamps instead of gut, if you insist, but it'll have to be done over."

Leveque sat down. "All right, Doc," he said, "you do that. I put myself in you' hands. You hurry, eh?"

The trapper was stony-faced and silent while Reinhardt clamped the edges of the wound together, except once when he muttered, "She knew, that devil. She mus'

have made Philip read her my letter. T'ousan' damn!"

"What's that?" Reinhardt asked. "What letter?"

"Nothing," Leveque said. "I tell you later, Doc. Now, nom de Dieu, hurry!"

Reinhardt straightened. "That'll hold, if you're careful. Better stay here and let me go after her."

Leveque got up and strode to the wall peg where his coat hung. "No, Doc, I know the trail better than you. If you go alone, maybe you don' come back, eh?" He laughed harshly.

Reinhardt shrugged, put on his own coat and boots, and followed Leveque outside. The man was trying to put on his wooden snow-goggles, but apparently they pressed too painfully against the thin bandage. He thrust them into his pocket impatiently and beckoned to Reinhardt.

Snowshoes on, Reinhardt followed him toward the slope of the mountain, shielding his eyes against the snow-glare. The wind was higher, it seemed to him. He turned and looked anxiously northward, then hurried after Leveque.

Reinhardt caught up with him at the edge of the trail. Marie's snowshoe tracks led straight down, far apart and irregularly spaced, as though she had been trying to run. Philip's paralleled them. They were out of sight by now, somewhere around the shoulder of the mountain.

He glanced at Leveque. The man was obviously in distress, though it was not like him to show pain. The metal clips in his forehead must be burning him like liquid fire in this cold air, Reinhardt thought. They tightened the skin until he could not quite close his eyes.

Leveque grinned twistedly. "She give me a good one, eh, Doc? Fire in her blood, that woman. That's why I marry her—an' now she give me something for lagniappe." He motioned toward the white bandage over his eyebrows, then winced. "Come on, Doc."

THEY saw them as soon as they reached the bend in the trail. Marie and the child were far down the mountainside, where the ridge trail widened past the treacherously narrow strip—two black, motionless dots, like dead ants on a sheet of paper.

Leveque strained his eyes, peering under his hand. "Ah," he breathed. "Something wrong. She break a snowshoe, I think."

Reinhardt started to move forward again, but the trapper stopped him. He was breathing hard. The wound had started to bleed again, and a trickle had run down into the corner of one eye, freezing into a crimson rime. "Wait a minute, Doc," he said. "I think I have to change my plan a little bit."

"What do you mean, Leveque?" Reinhardt asked.

"I don' feel so good, Doc," Leveque said, grinning. "That's big joke, eh, me not feeling good? So I think I leave you here while I go after Marie. You stay here, eh, Doc?" He drew a revolver out of the pocket of his coat.

Reinhardt looked at the gun. "I should have expected this," he said. "I found it hard to believe that even you could hate that much."

Leveque nodded. "Sure, I hate you," he said. "Why not? Why you leave the city an' come up here same time as me? So you can see Marie, no?"

"I was tired of the city," Reinhardt said. "Dr. Coudert retired and gave up his practice, and they needed someone here."

Leveque wasn't smiling any longer. "Sure, big doctor, you. But you can't cure Marie. Why? Maybe because that way Marie depend on you. Wait all the time for you to come. Maybe some time she forget how much she love our kid an' go away with you to big hospital like you want. You like that, eh, Doc?"

Reinhardt grinned faintly. "Do you still love her, Leveque?"

"I hate her," said Leveque, "an' she hate me, ever since twelve years ago. Why don' she leave me an' take the kid before now? Because she know with that whistle, whistle she can make me crazy. An' why don' I kill her before now? Because you know too much about me. Ver' smart, you two, but me, I'm gonna fool you!"

"'Ever since twelve years ago'," Reinhardt repeated softly, "Since the day four months after your wedding when you came home from a trip and found I had visited

her."

"I tol' you to stay away, Doc. When I marry her, I tell you, 'Doc, she pick me instead of you. Now I make sure she don' change her mind. You stay away, un'erstan'?"

"She was ill, Leveque. She sent a neighbor to bring me. But you're a jealous man, Leveque, and a strong one."

"Never mind that!" Leveque cut in harshly. He squinted at Reinhardt, then wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. "We talk long enough, Doc. I'm gonna tell you jus' one thing more, an' then I'm gonna tap you on the head with this gun, so there won't be no bullet hole if they ever fin' you. But I'm gonna bury you deep, Doc—you an' Marie. They won't find you."

He grinned twistedly. "Here's my big surprise, Doc. After Marie have her accident, you write all over, find out about me, eh? You find out I'm really French citizen wanted by police in Marseilles. An' you write it down so if you die the police here find it an' send me back. Sure, I know. You convince me of that all right. But las' month, I get a letter, too. From a friend in Marseilles. An' you know what? Some crazy man over there get caught for a murder. He confess to that, but he don' stop there. He confess to twenty murders! Sure, make himself big devil in the newspapers. An' one of those murders, Doc, is the one they want me for. I'm free, you un'erstan', Doc!"

Reinhardt stood, listening to the wind that blew down the mountain. He should fight, he supposed. He would fight, if he got the chance; but the outcome was certain. Leveque was strong as a bull.

WITHOUT warning, Leveque stepped forward and brought the gun-barrel down. Reinhardt tried to duck, but he wasn't fast enough. The hard metal caught him on the temple, raking down across his cheek.

Half-stunned, Reinhardt lay where he had fallen, waiting for Leveque to finish him. The big man swayed forward, peering over Reinhardt's head.

His eyes! thought Reinhardt foggily. He's going snow-blind!

Carefully, holding the gun poised in one hand, Leveque leaned down and pawed in front of him. The outstretched hand missed Reinhardt's snowshoed feet by inches. Leveque took a step forward, reached again, this time a little to the left.

Summoning all his strength, Reinhardt raised himself a little, pulled his body out of the way. The movement made a small, dull sound in the snow.

Leveque turned alertly, his gun raised. His wide eyes, rimmed by frozen eyelashes, were looking straight at Reinhardt, but they didn't see him. The dark pupils were cloudy, almost white. Freezing! thought Reinhardt, horrified. He can't blink, and they're freezing over.

Leveque's dark face was twisted. "I think I change my mind, Doc!" he called loudly. "I don' see so good, so I have to shoot you. Too bad, eh?"

He aimed the gun and fired. The bullet plowed into the snow at Reinhardt's side.

While the gun-roar still echoed around them, Reinhardt raised himself again and crawled another foot. Leveque fired again, and once more Reinhardt inched away.

Leveque stood still for a long minute, head cocked to one side, listening. Reinhardt lay still, trying to quiet the sound of his breathing, the thudding of his heart. His strength was coming back, but slowly. It would be suicide if he tried to get up.

"Four shots lef', Doc!" Leveque called. "One of them gonna kill you!"

He listened, but Reinhardt didn't move.

"All right!" he said at last. "You don' move, I can't shoot you, Doc. You stay there. I'm gonna come an' get you." He fell suddenly to his knees, then bent over and pawed at the snow until he found the trench Reinhardt's body had made. On hands and knees, he crawled forward, following Reinhardt's trail.

The wind whipped down upon them with sudden fury, raising clouds of whiteness. Reinhardt rolled over onto his belly and began crawling down the trail. Below him, now, he could see the black dots that were Marie and her child, still motionless in the snow. He crawled in a half-circle, dimly intending to lead Leveque away from them. Then he thought, No! They'll never make it down if I'm not there to help them. I've

## THE USEFUL SEAL!

*In addition to the fur seal, which has its summer home on the Pribilof Islands in Bering Sea, the five varieties of hair seals in the Arctic must be able to come to the surface to breathe. When the young ice forms in the fall, therefore, they make for themselves several breathing holes, which they use all winter. Lying on his ice shelf, above the water level, the seal drifts about; he must stay near his breathing holes. If one gets clogged up, he simply goes to another.*

*For the Eskimo and the Arctic explorer, the hair seal is the most useful of all the Arctic animals. The skin is used for clothing, boots, belts, cord, sled lashings, kayaks, rifle covers, raincoats, and containers for oil. The blubber is used for food for both men and dogs, for waterproofing leather, lighting the sod-and-driftwood cabin, heating the inner tent of caribou skins, and cooking. The intestines provide slickers and translucent material for windows.*

*In warm weather seals may be found swimming about in the open lanes. They are shot through the head so as not to let blood or water into the lungs. Since the seal is rather lean at this season, and is therefore likely to sink, he is secured by a manak. This is a chunk of wood a little bigger than a soft-ball, into which, at equidistant points three large fish-hooks have been fastened. A long cod line is fastened to the manak, which is launched by whirling it about the head until sufficient momentum is attained, then throwing it over and beyond the floating seal. The manak is hauled in slowly until it reaches the seal, then a sharp pull imbeds at least one of the hooks in the carcass. It is then a simple matter to drag the seal to the edge of the ice.*

got to lead Leveque past them somehow . . keep going until I get my strength back. If I went back up toward the cabin it would be a dead end. Then he'd get all of us.

The wind howled around them, masking the sounds they made in the snow. Once Reinhardt, looking back, saw Leveque raise his gun again; but he thought better of it and crawled onward.

Reinhardt got one foot under him, raised himself totteringly. The wound in his temple was sending slow, inexorable throbs of pain through his body. His legs felt like rubber. Somehow, he made himself lift the heavy snowshoes; put one foot ahead of the other. Right . . . left . . . right . . .

The mountains swam around him. Behind, like a creeping Nemesis, came Leveque.

The ridge began to narrow. Leveque came to the end of the deep trail Reinhardt had left, and rose to his feet, feeling his way slowly. There was no turning back now; the ridge was too narrow for Reinhardt to hope to slip by unheard. The two men plodded on, like figures in a nightmare: Reinhardt staggering with weakness. Leveque blind.

The wind grew heavier with each minute. Then, far off across the valley, Reinhardt heard a terrible sound: a low, deep sussurus that swept down and down, and finally whispered away in the depths.

Powder avalanche, thought Reinhardt; and we're caught on this infernal ridge.

They reached the narrowest part of the trail, the twenty-foot stretch that Reinhardt had always dreaded. Reeling, with the vertiginous depths around him, he started across.

MARIE and the child were close now, barely fifty yards away down the slope. He could see them dimly through the veils of snow that the wind raised before them. Behind, Leveque was coming steadily on.

There was a shuddering under Reinhardt's feet: a trembling that swept through his body from the snow beneath. Desperately he flung himself forward, stumbling as the ground reeled. He fell, rose somehow, plunged onward and fell again, just as the ridge dropped away behind him.

Reinhardt found himself flat on his belly, half-buried in the snow, staring across his shoulder at the chasm that had appeared behind him. For a space of ten feet, the ridge had vanished. It came to a point and stopped, and its walls were steep on three sides.

Leveque was still there, a yard short of the chasm. He stood for a moment uncertainly, then dropped to hands and knees and felt his way forward until he reached the edge. He drew back swiftly just as the snow began to crumble again. He stopped, thinking, then turned and crawled back the way he had come. He missed his direction and came to the edge of the trail

to the right. Confused, he turned at right angles and found the edge to the left.

He raised his head. "Doc!" he called

Reinhardt had had the wind knocked out of him. He could not answer. To your right, you fool, he thought. It's perfectly safe that way. And you'll be harmless up on your mountain until the Patrol can come and get you.

Reinhardt turned his head and saw Marie climbing toward him, leaving Philip a dark blob on the snow beneath. It was Philip's snowshoe that had broken, then. Marie's face was expressionless, but her dark eyes were staring beyond Reinhardt, to where Leveque crouched on the lip of the chasm.

"Doc!" called Leveque again. Then he muttered, "Mus' be dead." He raised his voice again. "Marie! Extends-tu, Marie? Ou est la trace?"

Reinhardt watched, appalled, as the woman pursed her lips. Her clear whistle rang out in the thin air: two low notes, then a high one; another high and a low one; two high, one low; low-high, low-high; then four high notes; a pause and then another. In the Morse code that Leveque had taught her, they spelled G - A - U - C - H - E. "Left."

Leveque hesitated for a long moment. He has to trust her, Reinhardt thought feverishly. If she's lying, any way he takes could be the wrong one. He hasn't any choice.

Leveque turned uncertainly, crawled a few steps forward, then called again: "Par ici, Marie?"

She whistled again. O - U - I. "Yes."

Still unable to speak, Reinhardt watched as Leveque crawled toward the lip of the chasm. The snow crumbled beneath him; with a shout, Leveque pushed himself back. It was too late. He went down like a falling stone. His despairing cry, echoing back, was like the shriek of wind around the mountain.

## THE SINGLE O KID

*In the early '80's, Wrangell, Alaska, was the outfitting point for some 30,000 gold prospectors who "stampeded" up the Stikine River, across the plateau from Telegraph Creek, and down the Dease River to the Cassiar gold diggings.*

*In those days, and under those conditions, Wrangell was a lawless town and the Deputy U. S. Marshal was no paragon of virtue: Hold-ups occurred every night; and the bodies of more than one "sourdough" and "cheechako" were found in the bay—usually with a .44 puncture.*

*There was one modest, pink-cheeked youth, however, who was never molested by the "gang." He was nicknamed the "Single O Kid" because of his accuracy with a six-shooter. There was, in fact, an armed truce between the "gang" and the Kid until they rang in a "cold deck" on his uncle. The Kid watched the play. When they had cleaned out his uncle, he pulled both pistols—and just stood there. He didn't say: "Hand over the money!" He didn't need to; the sight of those two guns was enough for the gamblers.*

*The Kid called to his uncle to take the money belt of every man who sat in at the game—every dollar and every bit of gold dust. "I'll teach the rats a thing or two," he muttered.*

*The gamblers made things easy for the Kid; they were anxious to have the whole thing straightened out to his satisfaction. They didn't know . . .*

*"Shut up!" the Kid told them. And they shut up. He lined them up, with their faces toward the wall, and told them to stay in that position for twenty minutes. They stayed. He and his uncle backed out of the door into the darkness—and Wrangell knew them no more.*

Marie looked down at Reinhardt, and her eyes spoke to him for an instant. She turned toward the chasm then, and her throat swelled, almost as if the long-dead vocal chords that Leveque had crushed between his hands were about to come to life again. She only whistled, but she somehow contrived to smile as she did it.

Reinhardt recognized the tune. It was, "Glad When You're Dead . . ."

# *The Wisdom of the Trail*

## By JACK LONDON

**"I want to exist!"—that's the dominant wail of the whole living universe. But in the land of the snow and frost the cry is a daily challenge . . . and only strong men, men of the breed of Sitka Charley are capable of meeting it.**

SITKA CHARLEY had achieved the impossible. Other Indians might have known as much of the wisdom of the trail as did he; but he alone knew the white man's wisdom, the honor of the trail, and the law. But these things had not come to him in a day. The aboriginal mind is slow to generalize, and many facts, repeated often, are required to compass an understanding. Sitka Charley, from boyhood, had been thrown continually with white men, and as a man he had elected to cast his fortunes with them, expatriating himself, once and for all, from his own people.

Even then, respecting, almost venerating their power, and pondering over it, he had yet to divine its secret essence—the honor and the law. And it was only by the cumulative evidence of years that he had finally come to understand. Being an alien, when he did know, he knew it better than the white man himself; being an Indian, he had achieved the impossible.

And of these things had been bred a certain contempt for his own people—a contempt which he had made it a custom to conceal, but which now burst forth in a polyglot whirlwind of curses upon the heads of Kah-Chucte and Gowhee. They cringed before him like a brace of snarling wolf dogs, too cowardly to spring, too wolfish to cover their fangs. They were not handsome creatures. Neither was Sitka Charley. All three were frightful-looking.

There was no flesh to their faces; their cheekbones were massed with hideous scabs which had cracked and frozen alternately under the intense frost; while their eyes burned luridly with the light which is born of desperation and hunger. Men so situated, beyond the pale of the honor and the law, are not to be trusted. Sitka Charley knew this; and this was why he had forced them to abandon their rifles with the rest of the camp outfit ten days before. His rifle and Captain Eppingwell's were the only ones that remained.

"Come, get a fire started," he commanded, drawing out the precious matchbox with its attendant strips of dry birch-bark.

The two Indians fell sullenly to the task of gathering dead branches and underwood. They were weak and paused often, catching themselves, in the act of stooping, with giddy motions, or staggering to the center of operations with their knees shaking like castanets. After each trip they rested for a moment, as though sick and deadly weary. At times their eyes took on the patient stoicism of dumb suffering; and again the ego seemed almost bursting forth with its wild cry, "I, I, I want to exist!"—the dominant note of the whole living universe.

A light breath of air blew from the south, nipping the exposed portions of their bodies and driving the frost, in needles of fire, through fur and flesh to the bones. So, when the fire had grown lusty and thawed a damp circle in the snow about it, Sitka Charley forced his reluctant comrades to lend a hand in pitching a fly. It was a primitive affair, merely a blanket stretched parallel with the fire and to windward of it, at an angle of perhaps forty-five degrees. This shut out the chill wind and threw the heat backward and down upon those who were to huddle in its shelter.

Then a layer of green spruce boughs was spread, that their bodies might not come in contact with the snow. When his task was completed, Kah-Chucte and Gowhee proceeded to take care of their feet. Their icebound moccasins were sadly worn by much travel, and the sharp ice of the

river jams had cut them to rags. Their Siwash socks were similarly conditioned, and when these had been thawed and removed, the dead-white tops of the toes, in the various stages of mortification, told their simple tale of the trail.

Leaving the two to the drying of their footgear, Sitka Charley turned back over the course he had come. He, too, had a mighty longing to sit by the fire and tend his complaining flesh, but the honor and the law forbade. He toiled painfully over the frozen field, each step a protest, every muscle in revolt. Several times, where the open water between the jams had recently crusted, he was forced to miserably accelerate his movements as the fragile footing swayed and threatened beneath him. In such places death was quick and easy; but it was not his desire to endure no more.

His deepening anxiety vanished as two Indians dragged into view round a bend in the river. They staggered and panted like men under heavy burdens; yet the packs on their backs were a matter of but few pounds.

Sitka Charley questioned them eagerly, and their replies seemed to relieve him. He hurried on. Next came two white men, supporting between them a woman. They also behaved as though drunken, and their limbs shook with weakness. But the woman leaned lightly upon them, choosing to carry herself forward with her own strength.

At sight of her a flash of joy cast its fleeting light across Sitka Charley's face. He cherished a very great regard for Mrs. Eppingwell. He had seen many white women, but this was the first to travel the trail with him. When Captain Eppingwell proposed the hazardous undertaking and made him an offer for his services, he had shaken his head gravely; for it was an unknown journey through the dismal vastnesses of the Northland, and he knew it to be of the kind that try to the uttermost the souls of men. But when he learned that the captain's wife was to accompany them, he had refused flatly to have anything further to do with it. Had it been a woman of his own race he would have harbored no objections, but these women of the Southland—no, no, they were too soft, too tender, for such enterprises.

SITKA CHARLEY did not know this kind of woman. Five minutes before, he did not even dream of taking charge of the expedition; but when she came to him with her wonderful smile and her straight clean English, and talked to the point, without pleading or persuading, he had incontinently yielded. Had there been a softness and appeal to mercy in the eyes, a tremble to the voice, a taking advantage of sex, he would have stiffened to steel; instead her clear-searching eyes and clear-ringing voice, her utter frankness and tacit assumption of equality, had robbed him of his reason.

He felt, then, that this was a new breed of woman; and ere they had been trail mates for many days he knew why the sons of such women mastered the land and the sea, and why the sons of his own womankind could not prevail against them. *Tender and soft!* Day after day he watched her, muscle-weary, exhausted, indomitable, and the words beat in upon him in a perennial refrain. *Tender and soft!* He knew her feet had been born to easy paths and sunny lands, strangers to the moccasined pain of the North, unkissed by the chill lips of the frost, and he watched and marveled at them twinkling ever through the weary day.

She had always a smile and a word of cheer, from which not even the meanest packer was excluded. As the way grew darker she seemed to stiffen and gather greater strength, and when Kah-Chucte and Gowhee, who had bragged that they knew every landmark of the way as a child did the skin bails of the tepee, acknowledged that they knew not where they were, it was she who raised a forgiving voice amid the curses of the men. She had sung to them that night till they felt the weariness fall from them and were ready to face the future with fresh hope. And when the food failed and each scant stint was measured jealously, she it was who rebelled against the machinations of her husband and Sitka Charley, and demanded and received a share neither greater nor less than that of the others.

Sitka Charley was proud to know this woman. A new richness, a greater breadth, had come into his life with her presence. Hitherto he had been his own mentor, had turned to right or left at no man's beck;

he had molded himself according to his own dictates, nourished his manhood regardless of all save his own opinion. For the first time he had felt a call from without for the best that was in him. Just a glance of appreciation from the clear-searching eyes, a word of thanks from the clear-ringing voice, just a slight wreathing of the lips in the wonderful smile, and he walked with the gods for hours to come. It was a new stimulant to his manhood; for the first time he thrilled with a conscious pride in his wisdom of the trail; and between the twain they ever lifted the sinking hearts of their comrades.

THE FACES of the two men and the woman brightened as they saw him, for after all he was the staff they leaned upon. But Sitka Charley, rigid as was his wont, concealing pain and pleasure impartially beneath an iron exterior, asked them the welfare of the rest, told the distance to the fire, and continued on the back-trip. Next he met a single Indian, unburdened, limping, lips compressed, and eyes set with the pain of a foot in which the quick fought a losing battle with the dead. All possible care had been taken of him, but in the last extremity the weak and unfortunate must perish, and Sitka Charley deemed his days to be few.

The man could not keep up for long, so he gave him rough cheering words. After that came two more Indians, to whom he had allotted the task of helping along Joe, the third white man of the party. They had deserted him. Sitka Charley saw at a glance the lurking spring in their bodies, and knew they had at last cast off his mastery. So he was not taken unawares when he ordered them back in quest of their abandoned charge, and saw the gleam of the hunting knives that they drew from the sheaths. A pitiful spectacle, three weak men lifting their puny strength in the face of the mighty vastness; but the two recoiled under the fierce rifle blows of the one and returned like beaten dogs to the leash. Two hours later, with Joe reeling between them and Sitka Charley bringing up the rear, they came to the fire, where the remainder of the expedition crouched in the shelter of the fly.

"A few words, my comrades, before we sleep," Sitka Charley said after they had devoured their slim rations of unleavened bread. He was speaking to the Indians, in their own tongue, having already given the import to the whites. "A few words, my comrades, for your own good, that ye may yet perchance live. I shall give you the law; on his own head be the death of him that breaks it. We have passed the Hills of Silence, and we now travel the head reaches of the Stuart. It may be one sleep, it may be several, it may be many sleeps, but in time we shall come among the men of the Yukon, who have much grub. It were well that we look to the law. Today Kah-Chucte and Gowhee, whom I commanded to break trail, forgot they were men, and like frightened children ran away. True, they forgot; so let us forget. But hereafter let them remember. If it should happen they do not . . ." He touched his rifle carelessly, grimly. "Tomorrow they shall carry the flour and see that the white man Joe lies not down by the trail. The cups of flour are counted; should so much as an ounce be wanting at nightfall . . . Do ye understand? Today there were others that forgot. Moose Head and Three Salmon left the white man Joe to lie in the snow. Let them forget no more. With the light of day shall they go forth and break trail. Ye have heard the law. Look well, lest ye break it."

SITKA CHARLEY found it beyond him to keep the line close up. From Moose Head and Three Salmon, who broke trail in advance, to Kah-Chucte, Gowhee, and Joe, it straggled out over a mile. Each staggered, fell, or rested as he saw fit. The line of march was a progression through a chain of irregular halts. Each drew upon the last remnant of his strength and stumbled onward till it was expended, but in some miraculous way there was always another last remnant. Each time a man fell it was with the firm belief that he would rise no more; yet he did rise, and again, and again.

The flesh yielded, the will conquered; but each triumph was a tragedy. The Indian with the frozen foot, no longer erect, crawled forward on hand and knee. He rarely rested, for he knew the penalty exacted by the frost. Even Mrs. Eppingwell's lips were at last set in a stony smile,

and her eyes, seeing, saw not. Often she stopped, pressing a mittened hand to her heart, gasping and dizzy.

Joe, the white man, had passed beyond the stage of suffering. He no longer begged to be let alone, prayed to die; but was soothed and content under the anodyne of delirium. Kah-Chucte and Gowhee dragged him on roughly, venting upon him many a savage glance or blow. To them it was the acme of injustice. Their hearts were bitter with hate, heavy with fear. Why should they cumber their strength with his weakness? To do so meant death; not to do so—and they remembered the law of Sitka Charley, and the rifle.

Joe fell with greater frequency as the daylight waned, and so hard was he to raise that they dropped farther and farther behind. Sometimes all three pitched into the snow, so weak had the Indians become. Yet on their backs was life, and strength, and warmth. Within the flour sacks were all the potentialities of existence. They could not but think of this, and it was not strange, that which came to pass. They had fallen by the side of a great timber jam where a thousand cords of firewood waited the match. Near by was an air hole through the ice. Kah-Chucte looked on the wood and the water, as did Gowhee; then they looked on each other. Never a word was spoken. Gowhee struck a fire; Kah-Chucte filled a tin cup with water and heated it; Joe babbled of things in another land, in a tongue they did not understand. They mixed flour with the warm water till it was a thin paste, and of this they drank many cups. They did not offer any to Joe; but he did not mind. He did not mind anything, not even his moccasins, which scorched and smoked among the coals.

A crystal mist of snow fell about them, softly, caressingly, wrapping them in clinging robes of white. And their feet would have yet trod many trails had not destiny brushed the clouds aside and cleared the air. Nay, ten minutes' delay would have been salvation. Sitka Charley, looking back, saw the pillared smoke of their fire, and guessed. And he looked ahead at those who were faithful, and at Mrs. Eppingwell.

"SO, my good comrades, ye have again forgotten that you were men? Good. Very good. There will be fewer bellies to feed."

Sitka Charley retied the flour as he spoke, strapping the pack to the one on his own back. He kicked Joe till the pain broke through the poor devil's bliss and brought him doddering to his feet. Then he shoved him out upon the trail and started him on his way. The two Indians attempted to slip off.

"Hold, Gowhee! And thou, too, Kah-Chucte! Hath the flour given such strength to thy legs that they may outrun the swift-winged lead? Think not to cheat the law. Be men for the last time, and be content that ye die full-stomached. Come, step up, back to the timber, shoulder to shoulder. Come!"

The two men obeyed, quietly, without fear; for it is the future which presses upon the man, not the present.

"Thou, Gowhee, hast a wife and children and a deerskin lodge in the Chipewyan. What is thy will in the matter?"

"Give thou her of the goods which are mine by the word of the captain—the blankets, the beads, the tobacco, the box which makes the strange sounds after the manner of the white men. Say that I did die on the trail, but say not how."

"And thou, Kah-Chucte, who hast nor wife nor child?"

"Mine is a sister, the wife of the factor at Koshin. He beats her, and she is not happy. Give thou her the goods which are mine by the contract, and tell her it were well she go back to her own people. Shouldst thou meet the man, and be so minded, it were a good deed that he should die. He beats her, and she is afraid."

"Are ye content to die by the law?"

"We are."

"Then good-by, my comrades. May ye sit by the well-filled pot, in warm lodges, ere the day is done."

As he spoke he raised his rifle, and many echoes broke the silence. Hardly had they died away when other rifles spoke in the distance. Sitka Charley started. There had been more than one shot, yet there was but one other rifle in the party. He gave a fleeting glance at the men who lay so quietly, smiled viciously at the wisdom of the trail, and hurried on to meet the men of the Yukon.

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# TIMBER GOLD

## By ROBERT R. RICHARDS

**That devil of a black-haired breed girl spiked more of Hank Marlin's timber-dreams than a whole pack of unruly loggers.**

HANK MARLIN'S caulked shoes dug into the beach. The shift of his walk, the sway of his shoulders, the knitted cap. They marked him for what he was. A timber man. A rigger. His hazel eyes narrowed as he stared up stream. The turbulent waters of Rotten River raced by his camp with a monotonous roar. It was music to his ears.

Beyond the river's roar there came the steady beat of a two-jack saw. From the echo Hank could almost guess the size of the tree being felled. His tawny hands knotted and he tensed. The saw echoed from another camp. And there couldn't be another outfit. All summer he hadn't seen a white face besides those of his crew. He, Hank Marlin, had picked every available man beached at the capitol city, Sitka, for his camp.

Whalers, mutineers, hunters, cowpunchers who had wandered up from Outside to duck trouble and seek more out of range of law, order and the sheriff. This was the raw material he must turn into loggers. But all of them had one thing in common. The whyfore of his hiring them. They all hated Big Jim Snyder, the up-river boss. This hatred welded them into a team, with the exception of Rider and Hubbard who had blown camp last night.

Hank felt there was only one man he

*The ramp supports shook, and the platform rocked from the terrific force of the timber pouring down.*

could rely on. Luke Kennedy, ex-whistle-punk from Montana. He'd been a rigger once too. Before the guy lines broke and cracked his knee-caps when he fell. "Luke!" Hank called. Kennedy hobbled to the beach. "Can't find hide nor hair of Rider and Hubbard." Luke said.

"The devil plague 'em!" Hank snapped, "It's the sound of that two-jack saw I'm interested in." Luke cocked his ear. "That ain't our men up yonder."

"You betcha caulks it ain't. There's an up-river camp. Reckon we'll locate Rider and Hubbard there. Fetch the rifles, Luke."

Kennedy hobbled back to the store-bunk. Hank Marlin was one fast moving lumber boss. Quick with his thinking. But a dreamer. Most times cool tempered. He knew how to handle men right good, Luke thought. But not good enough for this bunch. They pulled together when the going was smooth, just let one of them start grumbling and they'd be on Hank like a pack of wolves.

Luke returned with the guns. Hank dropped them in the belly of the canoe. They used the long end of their paddles like poles as they shoved off the gravelled beach. In mid-river they dug deep against the slapping current. They made their way along the opposite shore where the current was weak.

They paddled past a mile of black birch and hemlock when Hank's eyes widened. A pile of huge logs was stacked along the shore. Each nearly as wide as the height of a tall man. "A cold-deck of Sitka spruce." Marlin said with surprise. He had searched the region for the valuable timber without luck. There was a Sitka forest up-river but that was Big Jim Snyder's domain. Snyder laid claim to everything he could lay his hands on.

"Well, I know where they come from," Hank said as they resumed paddling. "It don't seem like Snyder would come this far down-stream." Luke was worried.

"Yup," Hank agreed, "but that's his timber."

Marlin said angrily, "*We* have to get a permit and Big Jim Snyder barges in and takes what he pleases."

"He's got the Eskimos quakin' in their moose shoes," Kennedy commented. "If he don't drown 'em with rot-gut whiskey, he buries 'em with Springfields."

AN INLET popped at them like a watery finger. The two-jack saw echoed loudly from within the inlet. They directed the canoe over the calm waters which were like a flat blue mirror framed with black birch forests. They covered the inlet with leisurely strokes. A pebbled beach loomed ahead. The canoe's cedar keel boomed upon the ground as they docked. A blue curl of smoke rose beyond the tree tops.

"A nice hideout," Luke said. Hank gripped his rifle and they broke quietly through the woods for a hundred yards. The trees ended suddenly at a clearing. Racks of salmon drying in the sun. Bunk houses and a cook house. Two jacks came at them from the bunks.

"Rider and Hubbard." Luke Kennedy was surprised.

"Like I figured." Hank Marlin leaped ahead and faced the runaways. "What's the matter . . . don't you like the grub down-stream?" he flung at Al Rider. The runaway jacks flushed.

"We like it better here." Rider said. Hubbard nodded in agreement.

"I'd like to see the boss stinkin' enough to waft away men from another camp!" Marlin cracked. He sighed disgustedly, "Can't blame guys bein' dumb. You were born that way." His sharp hazel eyes surveyed the small camp with contempt. "So you drop the best loggin' boss on the Alaska Gulf for this rinky-tink outfit?" He shook his head sadly and observed the effect on the runaways. Hank glanced quickly about to find fault. "Why, that spar-tree ain't rigged properly, he said, while knowing the cables were netted and cross-lined as perfectly as his own. 'Couldn't be worse if a woman was runnin' this camp."

"A woman is runnin' it," Rider said. "And she's got Sitka, that's more'n you got to offer us jacks when we dump our log load come end of summer."

Hank Marlin's jaw tightened. Rider had struck a sore spot. He was mighty touchy about his failure to get at Sitka. "Maybe she's a second cousin to Big Jim Snyder," Hank said.

"She's better'n that," Rider replied. "She's gonna marry Big Jim come first

frost."

"She's either a hag who can't get anyone or a worse thief than Snyder, or both," Hank said acidly. A screen door opened slowly in the bunk house set apart from the others.

"Here's the boss now," Rider grinned.

"I've never been called a hag or a thief before. To whom do I owe these compliments?" Marie Duprez asked with affected innocence.

"My names Marlin, down-river timber . . ." But the words locked in Hank's throat. He stared. For he had never seen a woman dressed in a logger's clothes before. Nor a face as pretty since he left Outside. He took in the curves of her lithe body. Black flame of hair. High cheekbones. Dark fiery eyes, slanted. She was a breed alright. And a darn tasty looking dish of femininity.

"What's the matter, Mr. Marlin," she smiled. "Haven't you ever seen a pretty woman before?"

"Tell the truth, ma'am, we ain't seen nothin' but dish-faced Eskies and an ugly mess of Injun squaws since . . . "

"Shut up!" Hank cut Luke Kennedy off. Marlin watched the bold defiant stance which strangely enough still managed to be feminine. "Alright, lady, seein' that you're the boss we can talk man to man." Hank Marlin froze his anger and spoke calmly. "We've unwritten laws up here. Number one. Nobody takes another outfit's jacks 'till the season ends." He spat on the ground. "But bein' a female I reckon you wouldn't understand fair play."

Marie Dupre's lithe body tensed. "I was born in my grand-dad's logging camp. He traded jacks. Lost 'em and got 'em back again. Don't tell me about this game. If you can't hold your men it isn't my fault." Her hands rested on her slim hips. "If Marie Duprez is easier to look at than your unshaven mug that isn't my fault either," she said, slamming the screen door in Hank's startled face.

As they walked from the bunk house the door opened and a knife shot from the girl's hand. Hank's knitted cap was skimmed from his head and nailed into a tree by the blade. He whirled about to face the laughter of Marie Duprez.

"Some shot!" Luke whistled.

Hank jerked his head. "Come on, let's go 'afore I really get sore at that lynx." He grumbled, "Boldest female I've seen in a coon's age." They headed for the inlet.

THE CANOE was waiting for them on the beach. "Seems to me I've heard the name Duprez spoken 'round the Gulf," Hank said.

Kennedy swatted a mosquito. "John Duprez's granddaughter. That's her," Luke said. "First Spanish fur traders in the region. Founded Cordova and Valdes. Ole John made a million if he made a cent. Tough as grizzly hide and mean as a hungry wolverine. Reckon that wild Duprez streak is in her. Mebbe it accounts for the knife wieldin'," Luke chuckled.

Hank frowned, "How come she's runnin' a camp along Rotten River if her grandpap has a heap of money?"

"I dunno." Luke was puzzled.

"Rider spoke about her marryin' Big Jim Snyder. Can't see how a gal like her would go for Big Jim," Hank declared hotly.

"Seems like you're takin' it kinda personal, boss," Luke grinned.

"Keep your mind on that paddle," Marlin grunted. "We'll be clear of the inlet in a minute."

"She's awful purty," Luke said. "Reckon if I was your age. Heck, I'd sort of get on kissin' terms with her. One fine day you might be showin' off a purty wife . . ."

"Me marry that tigress? Not on your life!" Hank snapped. They were on the river now. Marlin's eyes went to the Sitka cold-decked on the shore. "That's all I'm interested in. Timber. Sitka in particular." Hank was immersed in his thoughts. He wondered if the marriage talk just wasn't a lot of bunk. Still, Big Jim had given her Sitka and he never gave presents without a catch to it. It was more'n likely that old John Duprez had sent her here to flutter her big brown eyes at Snyder and get at his valuable timber tracts.

"What's that?" Luke said as his boss muttered.

Both men stirred at the crack of a rifle. A flock of black winged ducks honked fearfully towards the sky. The shots repeated. "Come on." Hank plunged the paddle. "There's trouble down our way."

"Must be that dawgone Beef Morgan

cuttin' up," Luke said.

Marlin nodded. It was likely Morgan or Dodge Corey.

## II

BEEF MORGAN stomped red-faced from the forest. His rifle slung over his thick shoulders. "No danged Eskimo is gonna take a bite outta my hide. I gave that slant-eyed son of a Bering seal the scare of his life."

Marlin didn't like it. Beef was trigger-anxious. All he had to do was plug one of Big Jim's men. Not that Snyder needed an excuse to clean them out. But there was no use provoking Big Jim. Marlin faced up to Beef Morgan. "Listen here, Beef, I hired you to buck lumber, savvy? Where I come from a lumber bucker carries an axe and not a gun."

"Aw, bean stinkers," Beef growled. "I know you're afraid of Big Jim. But I ain't. I seen a skinny Cockney cook drop Snyder on his tail three times afore Big Jim run him through with a knife."

"That's it," Hank said cooly. "I hired loggers. I don't want 'em carved into Thanksgivin' turkeys."

Dodge Corey edged into the talk. "We ain't satisfied with your way, Marlin. I know damn well why Rider and Hubbard run off. I seen them Sitka up-river." The loggers gathered. Their eyes fevered with revolt. Corey and Beef had been working on them. "We do the work while you draw pictures all day," Corey said. This brought a few nasty laughs.

Hank looked at the men. Yes, he did draw pictures as they called them. Plans. Plans that would get the lumber out faster than their brute man-power was capable of. How was he to explain this to them? They wouldn't believe it anyway.

"We ain't et nothin' but salmon for three months," Dodge Corey complained. "The freeze-up is comin'. It don't look to me like you'll get our timber on the river afore the cold breaks. Back on the Gulf you talked big about Sitka. Timber gold, that's what you called it. All of us were gonna get fat bonuses. We ain't seen a stick of Sitka since we been here!"

The reigns loosened on Hank's temper. "Alright, go where you can get Sitka! The whole kaboodle of you. Tail-kite on to Big Jim Snyder's outfit and leave me be!"

Luke whispered to Marlin, "They'll leave us here like a couple of broken boomsticks if you don't cap your steam."

Hank Marlin was unworried. He had dealt with grudging crews before. He knew this outfit. He was calling their bluff. There wasn't a man among them who didn't have a feud to settle with Big Jim. The loggers turned on Corey. Sure, they didn't approve of Hank Marlin. But Dodge Corey wasn't going to net them bonus money either. And Big Jim Snyder was one man whose guts they all hankered for, at the end of a spruce-spar.

"Alright," Corey turned to Hank, "we're givin' you five days to bring Sitka into camp. No Sitka. We head up-river and clean Snyder's camp like Beef and me been wantin' to do."

"Goldurn right!" Beef Morgan roared. His face going blood red at the thought of locking horns with Snyder. "Come sun-up we raid that up-river cold-deck."

"Hands off," Hank warned, "that belongs to a private camp."

"A private camp run by Snyder," Corey snapped.

Hank Marlin flushed. He had no way to disprove it. If Marie Duprez was fronting for Snyder, the men had every right to the timber. Big Jim had cheated them more than once on the coast. They had a kick coming. That was the gal's hard luck if she was in with the wrong gang. But if she wasn't, stealing the cold-deck would be brazen robbery. Besides, Snyder's renegades out-numbered them three to one. Suicide to attack him. Least they'd have a fighting chance on their home grounds.

"We got nothin' personal agin you," Corey began.

"'Ceptin' you're clean yaller and afraid of Big Jim," Beef added.

Hank Marlin's eyes narrowed. Keep calm, he told himself. You've gotta handle these wild numb-skulls without breaking any bones.

"That's a lie, Beef, and you know it. I say let Snyder come to us. And we'll give him merry hell. Meanwhile, we've gotta do with what we have. So keep your log hooks free of that up-river pile."

The gang walked off muttering with discontent. Hank wiped his neck. "Phew! Like tryin' to get a mule team to dance the Virginia Reel."

Luke Kennedy smiled. "You did alright, boss."

Marlin kicked at a stone in disgust. "Shoulda known better than try to lick a pack of waterfront toughs into smart timbermen."

"You've done your best," Luke encouraged.

"Reckon it ain't good enough." Hank sulked off. He saw his long dreamed plan of making a Sitka kill on Rotten River going up in smoke. He thought of the Eskimo who had taken a pot shot at Beef Morgan. Was he Big Jim's, the girl's man, or did he work for both of them. It was with these thoughts that Hank retired to his bunk house.

## III

HANK MARLIN glanced at the sketches on his table. From the window he could see the men working in the forest beyond the beach. Things were strangely quiet after yesterday's blow-off. The gang had gone out to fell trees much earlier than usual. Thousands of feet of timber were cold-decked in a clearing within his forest. Hemlock, white spruce, cottonwood, birch and cedar. A cold breeze trickled from the north. The frost was not far off. He had to get that timber flowing before Rotten River froze. In Alaska the temperature could drop sixty degrees in a night when the cold spell came. A river you swam in one day was set for dog sledding the next.

If the freeze-up came within a week he was through as a timber boss. It would take more than that time to clear the decks from the forest and assemble them on the beach. Bad enough to have missed out on Sitka. But if he couldn't get his lumber to the Gulf he wouldn't break even. Man-power alone wouldn't drag those cold-decks out in less than two weeks. If there were any horses in this territory Hank hadn't seen them.

Luke Kennedy popped into the cabin.

"We'll build a ramp," Hank said absently as he glanced up from his sketches.

"A skid-road. We'll elevate her by the cold-decks. She'll run like a railroad clear down to the beach. We'll grease her fine and the timber will slide like butter on to the beach."

Luke smiled in admiration. He examined the sketches. "A mighty fine idea. But it takes men. Sweat. Time."

Hank Marlin explained the plan. "It's simple. In five days we'll have every cold-deck on the river. We'll beat the frost, take out double the lumber we figured on in half the time, and shoot the whole works to the Skaguk mills on the Gulf. We won't be rich but we'll get paid for a season's work."

Luke Kennedy rounded up the men. For all their willing work in the forest they seemed particularly surly. Contrarily enough they appeared at the same time oddly satisfied and no longer hankering for open revolt. Marlin told them of his plan for the ramp. "That means every man-jack of us has gotta pitch like ole Harry for five days."

The gang stood by skeptically.

Hank singled Dodge Corey out. If he could win the disgruntled Corey the others would fall in line. "I reckon even Corey's for the idea. He ain't so dumb that he can't see the beach loaded with every scrap of wood we ever laid a blade on within a week."

"I dunno," Corey said. "How come you didn't get this idea before?"

"That's what I've been workin' on. Drawin' pictures," Hank said. The gang laughed. Corey was embarrassed. Marlin could see the loggers were ready to take a try at it. He left Luke in charge and headed up-river to buy grease from an Eskimo fish camp.

Paddling down-stream after leaving the fish camp, Hank slowed his canoe at the inlet leading to Marie Duprez's camp. It was dusk. He had seen a figure darting along the shore ever since he had left the Eskimos. The figure had disappeared at the inlet. He thought of the native who had taken a shot at Beef Morgan. Marlin reached for his rifle and coasted the birch bark into the inlet.

He hopped from the canoe and threaded quietly along the shore. He moved noiselessly through the woods. He could see the figure now. It was half-obscured beyond a dense growth of silver birch. The

gushing waters of a creek racing over rocks broke the stillness.

Then he saw the bare shoulders of Marie Duprez as she splashed within the creek waters. Her black flame of hair clung wetly to her copper tinted shoulders. Hank Marlin grinned. So this was where the beauty bathed. A twig cracked beneath his shoes as he advanced. Marie Duprez whirled about. Her dark eyes wide with fear. The fear vanished when she saw Hank's hesitant and ruggedly handsome face.

"Well, Hank Marlin, has your conscience brought you here?"

Hank had no idea what she meant. He was only conscious of the bareness of her shoulders.

"Nice of you to blush but I prefer your returning my Sitka, Mister Marlin."

Hank's face went crimson with anger. No wonder the gang had been up so early in the morning. They'd stolen the timber behind his back. Marlin had always been known as a man with a ready reply. He had stood up to the biggest blowhards in Alaska. And now he was standing here all thumbs before this pretty girl with a sharp tongue.

"I know nothin' about the stolen timber, ma'am," he blurted awkwardly. "If my men are stealing from you I'll see that your Sitka is returned. Meanwhile I'd be much obliged if you kept your snoopers away from my camp. My men are kinda jumpy. Once they start shootin' they don't always finish with the man they began with."

"I don't understand," she said.

"One of your Eskimos took a shot at my man," Hank said grimly.

"There are no Eskimos in my camp," she said quietly. She looked at him directly and her whole manner told him that he could believe her.

"Reckon I made a mistake. My apologies. Looks like Snyder was behind it." There wasn't anything more to say but Hank remained rooted to the spot. Her head half-turned towards him. Her shoulders glistening in the foamy waters.

"Wait," she said, and disappeared behind a huge slab of rock jutting from the shore. Hank stood by awkwardly, leaning against the birches. She re-appeared on a foot bridge beyond the rock. She wore the jack's clothes he had first seen her in. The logger's shirt which was too big for her. She looked awfully small and helpless beneath the back drop of the forest. And very pretty too. Hank felt his heart beat quickly.

Marie Duprez gathered sprigs of wood and silently avoided his gaze. "It's getting chillly early these days," she said in a friendly fashion.

"I'll build the fire," Hank offered.

The girl stared glumly at the flames. "The first frost will come soon," she said wearily. The first frost! He had forgotten. She was Big Jim's girl.

"SNYDER will come down-river to collect you soon," Hank said. Angry dark eyes flashed at him. She was the girl who tossed knives again. The soft tone was gone. "I'm not lumber," she snapped.

"No, but you're what goes with it."

Hank felt her palm slap his face. Mixed with Marie Duprez's anger there was fear. Hank knew now why he had lingered. The fear in her eyes answered his question. She didn't want to marry Snyder. Their eyes met. Hank drew her into his arms.

"Let go of me," she said, jerking herself out of his reach.

"I'm no good, but Snyder's alright, huh?" he baited.

"Nobody comes near me and that includes Snyder."

"He'll kill you if you cross him," Hank warned.

She laughed. "I've handled smarter ones than him. Ever since I was this high I made up my mind to show those high and mighty Duprez' that the 'breed' daughter of a drunkard Duprez is as smart as any of them."

"You little fool. Snyder can't be handled." Hank's voice rose at her stubbornness.

"I'm not afraid," she said, "as long as you're around. I know how you feel about me. You're in this too. If Big Jim destroys my camp he'll wreck yours too. I see through all of you big smart men. You need my help, Hank Martin, as much as I need yours."

Marlin's gaze was fixed upon the flashing dark eyes. He was irresistibly drawn to the pretty face. The more she behaved

like a wolverine the more he liked it. He grabbed her wrists. She struggled hopelessly against his muscular power. When his face was against her cheek she bit his neck and leaped to her feet.

"When Snyder comes for me you'll be there," she said. Hank shouted at her disappearing figure, "You'll come to me first." He mopped his brow. Marie Duprez was a spit-fire alright. But she'd come to him for help. He was sure of that. As Hank Marlin made his way to the canoe he was conscious once again of a figure lurking in the forest. Someone had watched them.

The shadow vanished through the stalks of trees towards the shore. Hank raced to his canoe. His eyes sought the river as he paddled through the inlet. Upon the river now he scanned the turbulent waters. There was nothing but a disappearing dot going up-stream. It was a very small canoe, probably a kayak.

## IV

UNLIK, THE ESKIMO maneuvered his kayak skillfully over the racing river. He was a long way from home for he had come from Nunivak on the Bering Sea. In his trade it was better to be far from home. In the spring he left the island village. In autumn he returned again. Always he came back with the valuable things of the white man. Combs, mirrors, scissors, lamps. His many trips across the Gulf had made him the richest man in Nunivak. The others looked upon him in awe.

He had been upon the lower reaches of Rotten River for many moons now. His heart beat with the happy excitement that only an informer knows when he has news to sell. And he had much news to sell Big Jim Snyder in exchange for the white man's goods.

The river twisted violently and Unlik guided his kayak along the shore. He stopped only once for food. The river was streaked with moonlight and he rowed on through the darkness without sleep. So anxious was he to reach Big Jim's camp. For this was great news that he carried. He would be able to ask for the most valuable goods in camp. When the moonlight dimmed he pulled his kayak ashore and dozed. There were rocks projecting above the water that even he did not know of. The sharp stone points would split his kayak. One must be careful.

At dawn he was on the move again. The wind tore at the birches and Unlik shivered in his kayak. He wore his summer parka. Each day there was increasing cold. The foliage had already lost its brief summer lushness. Yes, soon the autumn frost would come cracking through the valley of Rotten River like an ice coated whip.

His eyes widened. Beyond the birches the Sitka forest rose. Wooden giants, solemn and beautiful against the northern sky. Birch, cottonwood, hemlock, all were dwarfed by the great spruce trees.

Unlik's kayak entered a cove where a flat boat was anchored. Dozens of canoes lined the graveled shore. The lamps burned in a log house. The Eskimo listened to the shouts of the white men. They made much noise. Played many cards and emptied bottles of water that made one's eyes tear. Unlik knew how to play cards. But he pretended he was too ignorant to learn. If the white men knew he played they would make him gamble and he'd return to Nunivak without his precious goods.

Unlik approached Big Jim's table on silent feet. Another reason why he had been chosen for the job. The Eskimo's step was lighter than a leaf falling upon the ground.

Big Jim dropped the poker deck. His face was ruddy and nicked with scars. Reddish side-whiskers curled from his cheeks. "Talk! Don't stand there like a mud hut chief!" he shouted at Unlik.

"Man call Marlin steal Sitka from girl. She meet him in forest. He put face to girl cheek and try rub noses. She run." Unlik hesitated, hoping his words made sense. Larry Cragg turned to the men. "Reckon Big Jim's gotta rival. Why don'tcha make him best man, Snyder?"

Big Jim's fist shot out. The heckler hit the planked floor. Snyder grabbed Unlik by the scruff of his parka and dumped him in a chair. "You just answer these questions, savvy?"

"Me savvy." Unlik cast a fear filled glance at Cragg who nursed a split lip in silence.

"How many men has Marlin got?" Snyder asked.

Unlik counted off thirteen on his fingers. "Two men go to girl camp," he said.

"That makes eleven." Big Jim chuckled, "Heck, there's more'n thirty of us. Reckon we won't have much trouble, boys."

Unlik waited patiently for his next query.

"What did Marlin say when he met the girl in the forest?" The Eskimo's brow wrinkled. He had memorized the words but now they were garbled. He must be very careful and say it right.

"He say Beeg Jeem come catch you. She say no go to Snyder."

"Then what?"

"He make move to catch girl. She fight. She put teeth in throat like wolf. Run to camp."

Snyder frowned. He poured himself a drink, "Looks to me like this Marlin feller ain't gonna celebrate his next birthday."

The men laughed.

Big Jim shook hands with Unlik. This was the moment the Eskimo always waited for. The chief approved. Now he would tell Unlik to take anything he wanted. This time he would ask for the thin blade with the pearl handle. He would ask for a cup and soap. And for the tail brush white men rubbed the soap on their faces with.

Snyder listened to his request and smiled. "Give him a couple of shavin' mugs, lather soap and a razor," he said to Larry Cragg. Big Jim flung a cigar at Cragg. "Mebbe this will learn ya to keep your trap baited." Cragg picked up the cigar gratefully. They were as rare as sugar.

The door flung open and a cold gust of wind lashed the room. "It's snowin'. The first frost!" a man with a patch over his eye announced. Big Jim grinned broadly and clinked glasses with the nearest man. "Here's to me, boys. Come on. Drink up, you walruses! A toast to the bridegroom!"

"Reckon you'll look awful keen in that new parka," One-Eye complimented Big Jim. Snyder shoved the man from his chair and roared.

"You dang right I will, One-Eye!" When ole John Duprez gets wind of this we'll hold him up for a million foot of Sitka if we stick him for an inch," Big Jim shouted jubilantly. His gang shared the enthusiasm of their chief. They had been promised a generous share in the loot they believed Big Jim would get from the Duprez fortune.

THE NEXT few days were devoted to assembling the caravan. Stikine River Eskimos brought salmon, caribou, and berries. Athabascan Indians came with offerings of dried white fish and roasted dog meat. Not that they enjoyed giving gifts to Big Jim. But they knew better than to pass Snyder's camp with empty hands, especially when he was about to be married.

Nineteen canoes left the headwaters of Rotten River under a steady hail of snow. The shore water was already covered with thin ice, but the turbulent current kept the center clear and swept the heavily laden boats down-stream.

Big Jim glanced back from his lead canoe. He had enough provisions to feed a company of militia. Enough guns and ammunition to scatter Hank Marlin and his crew clear to the Gulf if any of them were lucky enough to evade his fire. He'd show this young logger who owned the river, the Sitka, and the only pretty girl that had ever set foot in the region.

The first night they pitched camp along the banks. Built fires against the cold, feasted and drank. But not of their own provisions. There was a small Eskimo camp that had no gifts for Big Jim. Snyder commanded a raid on the little settlement and used the deserted huts for firewood. During the excitement of the raid one boat had slipped away unnoticed. A kayak. Unlik looked back at the red glow of fires. He thought of the all night trip before him. It was worth it. Marie Duprez would pay well for the information he had for sale. He would collect more goods. And then across the Gulf to Nunivak.

Marie Duprez followed the movements of a kayak through the inlet with an apprehensive stare. The ice was forming on the river. The bright leaves had turned a fierce yellow over night. This shrewd eyed Eskimo who smiled from the kayak could be the first of Big Jim's men. The loggers gathered around while Unlik spoke. "Beeg Jeem come soon. Kill man call

Marlin. Kill all logger man he no like. Then take you home," he said to Marie.

Unlik extracted three watches and a gold cigar clipper for this information. He hurried back to his kayak and proceeded down-river, dipping his oars double-quick in the swift gurgle of the waters. He was unaware of the big figure that followed his progress along the shore. All of his native intensity went into his battle to keep from ramming into ice floes.

Beef Morgan slid behind a clump of white birch. His gun nozzle poked up through the branches. The kayak moved within the metal sight. The first bullet skidded into the water. The second one found its mark. The Eskimo slumped in the kayak. It kept to its course through momentum. One of Unlik's hands dragged lifelessly in the river. The other clutched a shaving mug. For a moment Beef Morgan's eyes blinked at the easy murder. Then he remembered how the Eskimo had tried to shoot him in the back. His eyes filled with terrible satisfaction and he headed for the beach.

THE LAST supports of the ramp were being hammered into shape. The men turned to Beef as he emerged from the forest. He met the questioning eyes of Hank Marlin. "I'll teach them seal-killers not to lay lead in my hide," he growled.

Hank swore under his breath. This was no time for personal vengeance. There was work to be done. The ramp not quite finished. He glanced at the rapidly freezing river. Three canoes were coming downstream. He saw the slight figure of Marie Duprez flanked by burly loggers.

She was coming to him after all. Hank forgot Beef Morgan and his anger. He greeted Marie with a broad grin of triumph. Her face bore a surly expression. "You and your gang have nothing better to do than steal lumber and murder innocent natives. You're no better than Big Jim Snyder!" She condemned them with a sweep of her arm.

Hank thought she had the darndest way of putting him in the wrong. "He was one of Snyder's snoopers," Hank said. "He tried to do us in first."

Marie was about to retort when one of her men cut in. "This ain't no time for quarrelin'. Snyder's on his way for a weddin' or a fight or both. We don't aim to get taken over by his renegades."

"You're willin' to fight under me?" Hank was suspicious.

The men nodded. "How about your boss?" he indicated Marie. "Shucks, this ain't no time to listen to women. We had a mighty bit of trouble with her, but she's comin' around to our way," he said. She stood sullenly by refusing to say a word.

Beef Morgan boomed, "Seems like we oughta head up-river and take Snyder by surprise." Some of the men agreed.

"Heck, I gotta better idea." Dodge Corey said. "We got the ramp. We got the timber with a cold-deck of Sitka thrown in. Let's get down-river with the load afore the river freezes. I ain't itchin' to scratch knuckles with Snyder jess 'cause this pretty face is shiverin' in her man's britches. This ain't no place for a woman. If she wants to be a man let her die like a man." The loggers roared with approval. But a few were silent.

Hank Marlin frowned. He saw that his men were divided. Not all of them agreed with Dodge. He would have to top Corey's proposal with some solid talk. "My friend, Dodge Corey, makes nice speeches." Hank's voice was slow and confident. The words dropped like stones.

"There's only one thing wrong. His way won't work. Because we're gonna be headin' down river with Snyder's gal and his Sitka. If all of Rotten freezes over we won't get the lumber to the Gulf. Snyder will have us in the open. Out-numbered. He'll pick us off like rabbits. Besides, I've gotta plan," Hank said confidently. "When it works it won't make any difference whether we deliver timber this season or not."

The loggers balked. "Some more theories?" Corey sneered.

"Big Jim's tail hangin' from the end of a skunk pole . . . his Stika forest owned by us. Does that sound like a theory to you? Stick with me men and you'll have it just as sure as I built that ramp."

Dodge Corey wavered. Marlin's proposal was inviting. And he had built a workable ramp. Licking Snyder and taking over his domain was a temptation. It would mean a decent life for all of them.

Maybe a town growing up on the site as Marlin once pictured for them.

"What if Snyder beats us?" Corey challenged.

"You've taken a chance on your life before, Dodge Corey, and for smaller stakes," Hank said. Corey was convinced. He knew Marlin was dealing straight. It was because Hank admitted they might be licked. Yes, Marlin had both feet on the ground and he'd take a chance. Hank sighed with relief. "Rider and Hubbard have come back," Luke Kennedy said. "They wanna join in." Hank studied the faces of the runaways. "Issue 'em guns from the store-room," he said to Luke and headed for the ramp.

## V

DUSK slipped quietly over the camp. The fallen leaves resounded to the steady beat of hail. Hank Marlin and his men were scattered in a semi-circle at the forest's edge. They had all of the beach and camp covered. They waited for Snyder and remembered Hank's instructions.

"Keep 'em on that beach. Don't let 'em get beyond it!"

Hank Marlin crouched beneath the raised section of the ramp where its platform was level to the tops of several trees. He eyed the skid-road which was slung like a toboggan slide above his head and smiled. Only the thought of Marie Duprez worried him. She had promised to remain in the cook house with Ula, the fat Eskimo cook. But Ula was shaken with fear. Hank knew she would take to the forest at the first shot. So far Marie had been quiet, too quiet. There was more kegged up trouble in that girl than a pack of unruly loggers.

Hank glanced up at the tall white spruce that stood like a sentinel above the ramp. Beef Morgan clung to the top-most branch in his lookout post. His broad face broke into a savage grin. Now that he had decided to stay he relished the thought of a knock-down and drag-out scrap. He'd been hankering for one all summer. Beef cried hoarsely, "I see 'em!"

Big Jim's black birch canoe lurched crazily behind the others. Looks like they're roarin' drunk, Hank thought. Rifle muzzles poked up like dark cornstalks from the zig-zagging boats. Thin sheets of river ice splintered against the barks. Larger cakes bunked with solid smacks and shook the canoes. The men lurched on to the beach shouting and shooting. Gallons of liquor had fortified them.

Shots whizzed from the forest and slit the dusk. Two of Snyder's men dropped on the beach. That seemed to sober the others who fell face flat on the gravel to avoid the fusillade. It was not going to be the picnic Big Jim had promised them.

Hank scaled the ramp slats with Corey, Rider and Hubbard. They stood upon the timber heaped platform which rose fifty feet above the earth.

A huge boomstick of cedar held the logs back on the platform. It was fastened by chains that were tied around the ramp's sides. Snyder's men clustered around the end of the ramp seeking protection from the sporadic bursts of gun-play from the surrounding forest.

Marlin and his men waited for Beef's signal. Beef Morgan laid his gun aside. He struck a match and dropped a flare. "Let 'em have it," Hank said grimly. Corey and Hubbard unlocked the chains. The boomstick skidded over the greased grooves followed by tons of rolling timber. The ramp supports shook and the platform rocked from the terrific pour of timber down the skid-road.

"Get 'em where it hurts," Beef Morgan shouted.

But Beef didn't have to tell them. The shouts of Big Jim's men, the torches dropping on the sand, the crash of spinning timber on the gravelled beach below, smashing canoes like match-boxes and over-turning the boats still on the river as the logs boomed and bounced over the broken patches of ice . . . they told the story.

Dodge Corey slapped Hank on the back. Marlin's theory had clicked. Corey and the others were all for him now. "Worked like a charm." Corey said.

"No time for pinnin' medals," Hank warned, "Snyder will bathe us in lead if we don't keep our eyes peeled." He made his way down the ramp slats. "Keep firin' at the beach. Don't break the formation."

BULLETS whistled through the tall lookout tree. Beef had revealed him-

self by dropping the flare. He grabbed at the guy lines and shimmied down the trunk. "Carnsarn bunch of . . ." A volley blasted from the beach and he hit the ground alongside Hank for protection. "They're pickin' off our boys at the cook house. I just seen Ula light for the forest," Beef said.

"Yeah," Hank's mouth tightened. "The gal is in there alone. They musta seen her at the window."

Eighty yards of open space separated them from the cook house. Their eyes squinted against the darkness. A figure had darted through the eighty yard space when the bullets had ceased coming from the beach for a brief time. Beef moved forward. Hank grabbed his arm, "Hold it!" A blast of lead sprayed the space. "They covered up for someone," Hank said. "They're tryin' to get that gal." The loggers' eyes met.

"You cover me while I dash for it," Hank said. His legs tensed. He shot across the clearing. Beef tailed him. Bullets broke from the end of the ramp.

Hank and Beef hid behind the cook house. "They've got a little nest at the end of the ramp," Hank said. Several shots rang from their side of the compound. The nest was silenced. Hank Marlin smiled as he saw Marie Duprez's men move across the clearing to set themselves up where Snyder's men had been.

"Lookit!" Beef Morgan's head jerked at the ground. Luke Kennedy lay curled against a tree stump. "He's in there. Cracked me with the butt of his rifle over the eyes." Hank didn't have time to stop nor did he have to ask questions. He knew it was Big Jim that Luke spoke of. "Easy, Beef. I'll bust the door in. You cover me again." Beef nodded.

Hank's boot went to the door and it gave way easily. It swung wide on the hinges and Big Jim Snyder staggered out with a crazy look in his eyes. He fell face to the ground. Marie Duprez's knife handle shivered in his back.

"She got 'em," Beef said. "Some gal, huh?"

They struck matches in the dark of the cook house. The girl was slumped over a table. "Get some water, Beef." Hank lifted her head gently. "She's fainted."

They turned. Voices at the door. A lamp swung into the room. It was Dodge Corey. "Scattered like a pack of wolves . . . boss." Hank grinned. This was the first time Corey had hailed him as top man. Things would sail easily from now on. The men lined up behind Corey. Not a disgruntled mug in the bunch.

"You did fine, boys," Hank said. "Pulled tighter'n any team of loggers I ever laid eyes on." Marlin paused, "Reckon you earned your pay alright. The river hasn't frozen complete as yet. You can take all the timber. It's all yours. I plan to stay on. If you boys wanna stick, that's up to you. Seems like I've got a theory that if we put in a winter up here we'll have an awful lot of Sitka to float down in the spring."

Marie Duprez looked up, "Does that go for me too . . . boss?" Hank smiled shyly, "Believe I'll have to hand you a special invitation seein' how you were the head man in your own camp."

"I know what's comin' next." Beef Morgan said in disgust, "When they get to lookin' that way at each other . . . aw hell, come spring maybe I'll dig myself up an Eskimo squaw."

"Dig is right," Dodge Corey said. "Ain't anyone who would fancy your ugly mush unless she was dug up like a skunk cabbage." The loggers laughed and filed out.

"Well, I'm waiting for the invitation," Marie mused.

"I thought we could sorta be partners," Hank mused.

"What have you got to offer, mister Marlin?" she asked. The young logging boss gazed at where the men had stood. "Take my gang. Bunch of rough no goods whom I picked off the waterfront. Maybe Beef was just jokin' when he spoke about takin' a squaw. But somehow I don't think so. These fellers feel deep inside of 'em that we're gonna build somethin' up here. And we won't build like Big Jim did either, right on top of the Eskimos, shootin', killin' and robbin'."

"That reminds me, Mister Marlin. You owe a debt. You can start being high minded right now and give me my Sitka back." Hank drew her supple form into his arms.

"Maybe we can trade without throwin' knives or slappin' faces." he said.

"Maybe we can." Marie Duprez smiled.

# LOST

## By Robert Service

*"Black is the sky, but the land is white—*
*(O the wind, the snow and the storm!)*
*Father, where is our boy to-night?*
*Pray to God he is safe and warm."*

*"Mother, mother, why should you fear?*
*Safe is he, and the Arctic moon*
*Over his cabin shines so clear—*
*Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon."*

*"It's getting dark awful sudden. Say this is mighty queer!*
*Where in the world have I got to? It's still and black as a tomb.*
*I reckoned the camp was yonder, I figured the trail was here—*
*Nothing! Just draw and valley packed with quiet and gloom:*
*Snow that comes down like feathers, thick and gobby and gray;*
*Night that looks spiteful ugly—seems that I've lost my way.*

*"The cold's got an edge like a jackknife—it must be forty below;*
*Leastways that's what it seems like—it cuts so fierce to the bone.*
*The wind's getting real ferocious; it's heaving and whirling the snow;*
*It shrieks with a howl of fury, it dies away to a moan;*
*Its arms sweep round like a banshee's, swift and icily white,*
*And buffet and blind and beat me. Lord! it's a hell of a night.*

*"I'm all tangled up in a blizzard. There's only one thing to do—*
*Keep on moving and moving; it's death, it's death if I rest.*
*Oh, God! if I see the morning, if only I struggle through,*
*I'll say the prayers I've forgotten since I lay on my mother's breast.*
*I seem going round in a circle; maybe the camp is near.*
*Say! did somebody holler? Was it a light I saw?*
*Or was it only a notion? I'll shout, and maybe they'll hear—*
*No! the wind only drowns me—shout till my throat is raw.*

*"The boys are all round the camp-fire wondering when I'll be back.*
*They'll soon be starting to seek me; they'll scarcely wait for the light.*
*What will they find, I wonder, when they come to the end of my track—*
*A hand stuck out of a snowdrift, frozen stiff and white.*
*That's what they'll strike, I reckon; that's how they'll find their pard,*
*A pie-faced corpse in a snowbank—curse you, don't be a fool!*
*Play the game to the finish; bet on your very last card;*
*Nerve yourself for the struggle. Oh, you coward, keep cool!*

*"I'm going to lick this blizzard; I'm going to live the night.*
*It can't down me with its bluster—I'm not the kind to be beat.*
*On hands and knees will I buck it; with every breath will I fight;*
*It's life, it's life that I fight for—never it seemed so sweet.*
*I know that my face is frozen; my hands are numblike and dead;*
*But oh, my feet keep a-moving, heavy and hard and slow,*
*They're trying to kill me, kill me, the night that's black overhead,*
*The wind that cuts like a razor, the whipcord lash of the snow.*
*Keep a-moving, a-moving; don't, don't stumble, you fool!*
*Curse this snow that's a-piling a-purpose to block my way.*

*It's heavy as gold in the rocker, it's white and fleecy as wool;*
*It's soft as a bed of feathers, it's warm as a stack of hay.*
*Curse on my feet that slip so, my poor tired, stumbling feet—*
*I guess they're a job for the surgeon, they feel so queerlike to lift—*
*I'll rest them just for a moment—oh, but to rest is sweet!*
*The awful wind cannot get me, deep, deep down in the drift."*

*"Father, a bitter cry I heard,*
*Out of the night so dark and wild.*
*Why is my heart so strangely stirred?*
*'Twas like the voice of our erring child."*

*"Mother, mother, you only heard*
*A waterfowl in the locked lagoon—*
*Out of the night a wounded bird—*
*Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon."*

*Who is it talks of sleeping? I'll swear that somebody shook*
*Me hard by the arm for a moment, but how on earth could it be?*
*See how my feet are moving—awfully funny they look—*
*Moving as if they belonged to a someone that wasn't me.*
*The wind down the night's long alley bowls me down like a pin;*
*I stagger and fall and stagger, crawl arm-deep in the snow.*
*Beaten back to my corner, how can I hope to win?*
*And there is the blizzard waiting to give me the knockout blow.*

*Oh, I'm so warm and sleepy! No more hunger and pain.*
*Just to rest for a moment; was ever rest such a joy?*
*Ha! what was that? I'll swear it, somebody shook me again;*
*Somebody seemed to whisper: "Fight to the last, my boy."*
*Fight! That's right, I must struggle. I know that to rest means death;*
*Death, but then what does death mean?—ease from a world of strife.*
*Life has been none too pleasant; yet with my failing breath*
*Still and still must I struggle, fight for the gift of life.*

*Seems that I must be dreaming! Here is the old home trail;*
*Yonder a light is gleaming; oh, I know it so well!*
*The air is scented with clover; the cattle wait by the rail;*
*Father is through with the milking; there goes the supper-bell.*

*Mother, your boy is crying, out in the night and cold;*
*Let me in and forgive me, I'll never be bad any more:*
*I'm, oh, so sick and so sorry: please, dear mother, don't scold—*
*It's just your boy, and he wants you . . . Mother, open the door . . .*

*"Father, father, I saw a face*
*Pressed just now to the window-pane!*
*Oh, it gazed for a moment's space,*
*Wild and wan, and was gone again!"*

*"Mother, mother, you saw the snow*
*Drifted down from the maple tree*
*(Oh, the wind that is sobbing so!*
*Weary and worn and old are we)—*
*Only the snow and a wounded loon—*
*Rest and sleep, 'twill be morning soon."*

# SPITTLETRIGGER

## By G. W. TWEEDDALE

**Sourdough knees were aknockin' against the fear of claim-jumpers on Anvil Creek these days. All but one, that is. Old Sam Higgins was walkin' about Scot-free and gunless, just invitin' them gold-grabbers. Crazy as a fox, that Sam.**

SAM HIGGINS stood stiffly erect, his lantern jaw thrust out aggressively. His partner, Smilie Williams, was remonstrating with him, and Sam did not like arguments, or, as he would have put it, tongue fightin'.

"I'm telling you," Smilie was saying, "since word went out about the big strike on Anvil Creek here, stampede lawyers and gun-toting claim jumpers have swarmed into this Nome camp like locust. Claims have been jumped already on Anvil Creek within rifle range of us. And you rear back on your haunches and tell me you ain't strapping on artillery to help protect our property. You know that Discovery, also One below, have been jumped. And when they start upstream, we, having Two and Three above, are directly in their sights."

Sam Higgins reached a hand to his hip pocket and brought forth a full one pound plug of his favorite chewing tobacco. He bit off a generous chunk. Then rolling the squid several times, tilted his chin heavenward and spewed into space.

"I ain't," he declared, "strappin' on a shootin' iron. Also I ain't lettin' any polecat steal our claims. I reckon we got nothin' to worry about. I've heard, like you say, about gun-totin' sidewinders swarmin' over the third beach line, but I ain't seen no bad ones up this way as yet.

"Maybe you ain't," interrupted Smilie, "But I have. And I'm banking the crowd that took over Discovery and One below is an organized gang. They are out to get all Anvil Creek. And the fact they've two killings already to their credit is plenty proof that you either fight to protect your property, or you lose it and get shot up to boot."

Sam hitched his suspenders, placed a thumb in each loop, and stared stonily at his partner. "Seems to me, Smilie, you got the jitters. Now, like you say, we has Two and Three above. But on Number Two is the name of Sam Higgins. So if them wolverine do work upstream they's goin' to hit Number Two first. And Sam Higgins is goin' to be sittin' astride of that claim when they gets there. And to make sure, I'm movin' onto Two above right now. So you kin quit worryin', Partner. Them rip-roarin' gun-slingers got to pass me afore they get to Number Three."

Smilie Williams raised a hairy fist and shook it under the nose of his partner. "Why, you first cousin to a rocky mountain canary," he shouted. "Since when did I take you on as a wet nurse? When you get that stiff neck of yours bowed, Sam Higgins, I'm tempted to pull you apart and see what makes you tick. Here I spend two hours straining my intellect in an attempt to talk some reason into you. And you stand there wagging your jaws just like the stupid and obstinate fellow I have before referred to."

"I don't just recollect," Sam answered with great dignity, "what Noah Webster says about intellect, but I is of the opinion you was complimentin' yourself when you states that was what you has been strainin' for this past two hours. And now, Partner, I's movin' my pup tent onto Number Two. We kin eat here on Number Three, so I ain't takin' no cookin' outfit."

"Me being the cook," chuckled Smilie, "I'd say that you have at last give out the whereabouts of the small spect of intelligence I have been trying to locate for this past two hours. And I'm sure glad it has come to light, even if it did prove to be located amidship in place of the upper deck."

"My meanin' was," retorted Sam, "That it is a well-knowed scientific fact that if a man takes on a little pison every day for a long spell, then quits all to once, it kills him dead. And I's been takin' on your pison cookin' for a whole year. And as for that little speck of intelligence you are so worried about: I'm sorry that a speck is so small, it can't be divided between us. Now if I had two specks I just might, you bein' my partner, help you out by loanin' you one."

*"I ain't ever," Sam was saying in a conversational tone, "hit a man I already put down."*

"ANSWERING that most unappreciative statement regarding my cooking, Mr. Sam Higgins, I am ready to admit that you are full to overflowing with poison. However, it ain't, by any stretch of imagination, food poisoning that fills your ornery carcass. It's your cantakerous disposition that feeds the poison continually into your damned system. And now, Sir Galahad, I'm going to follow your suggestion and relax, with the comforting thought that I'll be breaking a spruce bough over your grave before the week is past. And in parting I only wish to say that I much regret the time I have wasted trying to talk some sense into that empty cranium of yours. Which same common sense reasoning bounces off your ivory dome like hail off a cabin roof."

"I'm leavin' for my claim," his partner declared haughtily. "But in passin' will be wonderin' if pison kin come from association? Also, if sense, common or fancy, kin come out of a vacuum?"

Smilie Williams did not reply. Not that he was willing to admit that he was at a loss, but he felt that Sam was slightly in the lead in their verbal battle. He sauntered to the sluice, dropped into the pit, secured his tools and attacked the bedrock with his pick. At the same time

watching Sam out of the corner of his eyes, in the hope that Sam would change his mind at the last moment. However, he showed no concern when his partner stalked down the trail.

Smilie was worried though, now that Sam had really gone alone to Number Two. Also very much exasperated at what he considered the unreasonable attitude of the big Scot in refusing to arm himself, even in self-defense. That it was not cowardice, Smilie would have staked his life. Too many times in the past Sam had proved himself a man of indomitable courage. Headstrong, yes; obstinate, yes; but not a coward. It was hard to figure what was behind his refusal to take common sense precautions.

For over an hour Smilie toiled, picking and barring at the tough bedrock. But his heart was not in his work. He pictured Sam unarmed and facing a gunman, perhaps a pair of them. And the same stubborn nature he had displayed in refusing to arm would be sure to crop up, thereby offering an excuse to the outlaws to mow him down.

Smilie threw down his tools and climbed out of the pit, then paused, irresolute. He would not, for the world, admit to Sam that he was concerned about him, any more than Sam would have admitted any anxiety for Smilie. No, he would just explain to that darned-fool partner of his that he was afraid of losing the claims. That settled, Smilie headed out on the down-trail.

When he reached Number Two above, Smilie was traveling at a fast dogtrot. He worked his way along the rim of a low bench until he reached the lower limits. Then stooping low he crept to the edge and peered over.

Sam had selected a spot for his camp near the center of the stream bed, and had pitched his tent directly across the trail. At the moment he was tacking onto a willow stake, what Smilie guessed to be a no trespass sign.

Smilie braced himself on the gravel bank and craned his neck. The big Scot had returned to his tent and was sitting in the opening with chin in hands, apparently deep in thought. Finally he rose and went to the opposite side of the wash, facing the bank.

To a stranger the actions of Sam Higgins for the following ten minutes would have been nothing short of balmy. He stood straight, shoulders back and feet together, as if at rigid attention. While at about ten second intervals his long chin would tilt upward, and from between his teeth would spout a long stream of tobacco juice.

Even Smilie was convinced, after watching the strange doing, that Sam had become mentally unbalanced. Carefully he rehearsed their conversation over Sam strapping on a gun, and Sam's refusal to comply with the request; of Sam's nocturnal adventure, two evenings back, when Sam walked out of their sleeping tent and did not return until daylight. Then refusing to explain his absence.

SLOWLY Smilie backed away from the rim and rose to his feet. Any lingering doubts he might have had were gone. Sam was crazy. He tried to recall what he had heard regarding mental cases. One thing, and one only, seemed to stick in his mind. Such cases should be humored. He would have to humor Sam. There was only one way.

Having reached this decision, Smilie removed his Mackinaw, unbuckled his gun belt and adjusted it over his left shoulder. Then putting on the Mackinaw he pushed the holster well back out of sight. He would retain his gun in case of attack, but must make Sam believe he was unarmed. That way he might persuade Sam to hold down Number Three while he took up guard duty on Number Two.

Taking care not to expose himself to the sharp eyes of his partner, Smilie made his way back along the bench for a quarter of a mile, then dropped down to the creek just opposite his camp. He would put some beans on the stove for supper before going down to relieve Sam. He threw back the flap of the tent, and was reaching for the wood box, just inside the door, when something cold and hard jabbed into his spine.

"Raise your fins, Peanut, an' raise 'em high," growled a deep base voice. "Me an' my partner is takin' over."

Smilie Williams was mad, mad clear through at his own stupidity in walking into such a trap. As he slowly raised his

hands, his right hesitated at shoulder level. Could he, by any chance, reach his .45 before a bullet from the gunman smashed through his body? The click of the cocking gun in the hand of his assailant decided him against attempting to defend himself. It would only mean instant death. The man reached around and patted the bulge in Smilie's mackinaw, then his hand shot under the lapel and came out with the gun.

"Thought, for a minute, I was goin' t've t' stink up my new cook tent," the gunman said. "Now I has got no objections t' bumpin' you off—kinder likes t' watch 'em kick—but when I snuffs you out I's goin' t' do it out on one of 'em gravel bars, so I kin h've Pete dig a hole an' then, by givin' your carcass a kick, plant you, legal depth an' all, without stinkin' up his mittens."

The outlaw moved around in front of his victim. And Smilie's eyes narrowed as the man, a burly redhead with carbine held waist-high, came into his line of vision.

"So," taunted Smilie. "Red Wooley, sidewinder, whiskey runner, chicagorilla, and now claim jumper. Ain't your boss told you, Red, that regardless of any temporary advantage you polecat may gain by this organized banditry, eventually a United States Marshal will put the cuffs on you and the hangman will, shortly thereafter, pull the trap from under your dirty feet?"

Red Wooley's face grew livid with rage, and he raised his gun to the level of Smilie's chest. "Stow the preachin,' Sucker," he bellowed. "Afore I changes my mind an' shoots your guts out."

Then as Smilie, exercising discretion, closed his jaws with a snap, the big redhead prodded him with the barrel of his carbine. "Mush, you Malemute," he shouted. "Mush! An' iffin you is snappy I lets you live till we gits t' Number Two, whar Pete has got your partner hogtied."

As they went down the trail Red Wooley continued his threats. Smilie knew that the outlaw was only talking in the hope that Smilie, knowing he was slated for gun fodder anyway, might take the thousand to one chance and turn on his abductor, thereby giving Red an alibi for shooting a man down in cold blood.

Smilie Williams was in a tough spot, and he was desperately seeking a way out. Another hundred feet and they would come in sight of Sam's tent. If Sam were really a prisoner, Smilie determined to take his chances with Red before they reached the camp. Wooley was walking about five feet in back of him, and so sure his prisoner was tamed that he was swaggering and holding his gun loosely.

AT THAT moment they rounded a point and there was Sam's camp. The big Scot was facing down stream, his hands carelessly linked behind him, and seemingly unaware of the approach of the two men. Red Wooley whistled as the air screened in through his drooping mustache. He was plenty worried at the absence of his accomplice.

He closed the gap between his prisoner and himself. "Why in hell is that thar partner of yourn standin' that away?" he growled, as he poked Smilie in the back. Receiving no answer he raised his voice and bellowed hoarsely. "You thar, what in hell you doin'?"

Slowly Sam Higgins turned. "Who in hell is askin'?" he inquired. "Bein' on my own land, and havin' a NO TRESPASS sign up for those to read who kin read, I take it your education has been neglected. And, though I don't know the polecat language, I'm of a mind to give you a lesson that will make the carcass of a certain polecat stink even worse than it stinks a'ready."

Red Wooley swung his carbine so as to include Sam within his range, then shouted warningly. "Me an' my crowd has took over these here claims. An' I's orderin' you an' your partner t' start travelin', an' make it snappy. You had a'ready wasted my valuable time. Maybe I'd better make buzzard feed." The little pig eyes, in the livid face of the man, were squinted to mere slits. A killer was on the loose. He motioned Smilie ahead, then advanced on Sam.

Smilie Williams tried to convey to his partner the fact that the killer was lusting for the kill. But if the big Scotchman understood there was no evidence of it. Sam Higgins' gaze was concentrated on the redhead. His pose was the same as

the one he had taken when Smilie watched from the bench, with the exception of his hands, which were still linked behind him. And the lantern jaws were working a little faster than usual.

"Mush!" commanded Wooley. "Mush, an' do it on the run." He drew a bead on Sam. Then Smilie jumped, and the gunman, still keeping an eye on Sam, swung the gun muzzle toward Smilie.

At that instant the chin of Sam Higgins tilted up and a great stream of tobacco juice sailed through the air, landing directly between the eyes of Red Wooley. As Red's hand swept up to free his vision of the blinding fluid, the feet of the Scot left the ground and a moment later the gun-toter was sprawled full length on the bar, with Sam Higgins sitting complacently astride of him. So swiftly had the attack been carried out that Smilie had only covered half the distance separating him from Wooley when Sam reached his man.

A broad grin spread over the face of Smilie Williams as he stooped to retrieve the fallen gun of the outlaw. Sam was sitting motionless astride his captive. That is, motionless except for the almost rythmic working of his jaws. As Smilie straightened up, Sam was delivering a second charge into the outlaw's eyes at point-blank range.

"I ain't ever," Sam was saying, in a conversational tone, "hit a man I had already put down. But Polecat are different. Now I gave your partner a full half dozen. And seein' you're his boss I ain't goin' to neglect you. No, Sir! You're goin' to receive a full baker's dozen."

Red Wooley, completely blinded by the second deluge, suddenly wrenched his right hand free and struck out. The blow scraped Sam's shoulder, and skidded to his chin with sufficient force to dislodge a tooth. The next instant the arm was caught in a lightning hammer lock, and the gunman's nose was deep in the bar gravel.

Slowly, while Smilie roared with laughter, Sam Higgins extracted a strip of rawhide from his pocket and fastened Red Wooley's hands securely behind his back. Then, reversing his position, Sam tied the feet in the same manner. For a moment the Big Scotchman sat contemplating his fallen adversary. Then rising he placed a toe under the belly of the outlaw and turned him on his back. At the same time emptying his cheeks of a huge accumulation of tobacco juice. The charge again landed between Red's eyes and spattered generously.

Now that he was thoroughly thrashed and trussed up, all the fight was out of Red Wooley. His face, or the patches visible through the streams of diluted nicotine, was white, and stark, maddening fear flared in the bloodshot eyes. "Don't bump me, Boss," he pleaded. "I ain't fit t' die. An' iffin you lets me off I's agreein' t' leave this here Nome camp. Also, I agrees t' snuff out that thar bossman that hired me t' clean you an' your partner up."

"You white-livered hound-dog! So you are going to double cross me."

SMILIE WILLIAMS and Sam Higgins wheeled to face the tall, lanky speaker. Smilie instantly recognized the man from his long handle bar mustache. He was none other than the boss of the claim jumpers, the notorious Spider Smith. Spider had sneaked up from their rear. And for the second time that day Smilie swore softly at his carelessness. He and Sam had allowed success to go to their heads. Now they were again under the guns of a killer. But this time the fastest trigger-finger in the North was behind the guns. Spider stood easily, each hand holding a large .45. His eyes contracted, and the gun in his right hand spurted flame —Red Wooley shuddered once, then lay still. Slowly the man advanced until he stood directly in front of Smilie.

"You have," he said harshly, "decided that life is no longer worth-while. Or am I wrong?" Smilie did not answer. With a nod toward the dead man, Spider continued, "That carrion there was my deputy, and he had orders to let you live only if you did not resist. My word is law, Mr. Man, on Anvil Creek and in Nome. Now what do you say? Do you head for the beach, or for hell?"

This man was a different type from Wooley. He was not a bluffer, but a ruthless killer. Smilie measured the distance separating him from Spider. It was not more than six feet, and a sudden leap would most likely be fatal. Yet he de-

termined to try it. Sam, he knew, was at his shoulder, just a step to the rear.

The outlaw was speaking again, his voice was soft, but deadly. "I'm counting to ten, then shooting twice." He started counting. "One, two, three, four—"

Smilie leaped. There was the deafening roar of two shots fired in the same instant. Something struck Smilie and he went down. He rolled once and came up. He had fallen in a little patch of loose sand and for a moment his vision was blurred. As he made for the spot where the outlaw stood, his feet contacted flesh, and he heard the indomitable Sam say:

"You skinned my shin and I resents it. I resents anythin' that interfers with the business in hand. In educatin' this top boss I has to use a full half-pound plug. And at two dollars a pound that's high-cost education for a polecat."

As he dabbed at his eyes, Smilie discovered why the dry sand had stuck so tight. Part of the eruption directed at Spider, by Sam, had been sidetracked by the stiff breeze that was blowing and had blinded Smilie as well as the boss gunman.

Smilie did not upbraid his partner for his nicotine bath. In fact, his face was very red with embarrassment when he turned to Sam, who was holding his latest victim in the same fashion he had held Wooley, and administering the same treatment.

As Smilie reached for Spider's guns, Sam suddenly released one hand and shoved it under the outlaw's jacket. He brought forth a short-barrelled derringer and threw it to Smilie. Then turned Spider on his face and trussed him up before rolling him over on his back again. Smilie bellowed with laughter at the expression (that of a reluctant parent administering a chastisement) on Sam's face as he extracted his plug for a fresh chew.

But Smilie was far from merry as he placed a hand on Sam's shoulder and said sheepishly. "Sam, I wants to apologize for what I said this morning. Twice today you've saved our claims, and our lives as well."

Sam Higgins swung around and rose to his feet. "Gettin' cramps in my legs with so much sittin'," he declared. "And besides, from standin' distance I kin add more force without wastin' the juice." He reached a hand to Smilie. "Might've been better if we'd strapped on guns, Partner. But I was anxious to win that two hundred ounces Bill McCan bet me when Bill and I was aplayin' poker, night afore last.

"You see it was this way: Bill was tellin' me, while we was aplayin', 'bout them bad gun-slingin' claim jumpers. And how you and me ought to quit minin' and get out our Winchesters. Well, along towards mornin' when I was feelin' my cups, I up and bets Bill two hundred ounces I kin spittletrigger this gang, one at a time.

"And now, Partner, I'm takin' as a prize of war this Spider man's belt and guns. And from here out I's aplayin' accordin' to custom."

With great deliberation Sam Higgins emptied another charge into Spider's face. Then pointed a finger at his tent and said. "I wonder, Partner, if you'll take them gags off them two sidewinders I've trussed up inside my tent. It is time we started our prisoners for town and let the law take over the carcass of Wooley."

Smilie gasped. "You mean to say," he yelled, "that you spittletriggered two of them gangsters before my arrival?"

Then, as Sam nodded assent, Smilie reached for the plug in his partner's pocket. "Suppose I could learn to chew tobacco?" he asked.

"Any man kin chew tobacco," Sam Higgins assured him. "But it takes a might of practice to get to be a first class Spittletrigger."

## B.P.O.E.—BEWARE!

*If you ever go to Alaska as a tourist, beware of two things: The Indian or Eskimo who gives new ivory that soft, velvety, old-ivory tint by boiling it in seal-oil; and the clever old geezer who, with modern lathe and polishing wheel, works over a walrus tooth until it becomes such a good imitation of an elk's tooth that even an expert finds difficulty in differentiating between the real and the spurious. Many an Elk is wearing a walrus tooth.*

# OO-LIK, THE POLAR BEAR

## By BURTON R. PECK

**Oo-lik, son of Nanook, white tigress of the North, gets his first taste of bloodshed and rifle bullets as man—hated foe—stalks the bear pack.**

IT WAS THE first day of May. Spring had arrived in that Arctic wilderness which lies between Alaska and the North Pole. Already the disintegrating influences of sunlight and southern zephyrs could be seen, here and there, in the inviting pools of fresh water on the sea ice, where huge snowdrifts had melted.

In the lee of a huge upturned slab of ice lay Nanook, the polar bear, and her cub.

The warm afternoon sun beat down upon them. Surfeited with thirty-pound meals of blubber and meat, over a period of two weeks, from a whale carcass which she had discovered, the mother bear's bony framework had almost completely filled out.

Moreover, she had practically recuperated from two trying experiences: Motherhood and hibernation. True, her fur was soiled and bedraggled; but to Oo-lik, her three-months-old cub, she was the most beautiful mother in the world.

The cub stirred uneasily; whimpered in his sleep, like a tired fox-hound. He opened his dark eyes: The light, reflected from the snow, almost blinded him. Oo-lik would like to have some milk, but he knew from experience that his mother would be irritable if she were awakened. He yawned, curled up beside her, and went back to sleep.

When the cub awoke, four hours later, the sun, a dull red ball of fire, was dipping gently beneath the horizon of their glistening world. The snow-covered peaks of the Endicott Range were silhouetted against a pinkish glow, then the blazing orb dropped sluggishly out of sight. For perhaps an hour the sun's red-gold rays shone out from behind the mountains. Then night settled upon the Great White Desert.

With his black little tongue the cub licked his sleeping mother's nose; in his opinion, she had slept long enough. Drowsily, she brushed a forepaw across her snout. The cub was swept off his feet by this movement; but he quickly regained his feet. Again he applied his rough little tongue. The old she-bear raised her head. Oo-lik stood on his feet, and whimpered. She was still half asleep; but the cub persisted. Reluctantly she propped herself against the slab of ice. Oo-lik gripped one of her breasts with his paws as if this were to be his last meal on earth.

When Nanook and her offspring rose, they left behind them two depressions, where the heat of their bodies had melted the snow. It was a great temptation to the mother bear, after months of fasting, to bed down at the whale carcass. Here were tons of meat to be had without effort on her part. For the first time since the birth of her cub she felt that they were comparatively safe; the little creatures did not, as a rule, venture far from shore. Besides, this was an opportunity that probably would not come again in her lifetime—the opportunity to renew her acquaintance with other female bears. Oo-lik was enjoying himself with the other cubs; and the weather was balmy. The smooth water in the open lane reflected a tranquil, pearl-gray sky, with spots of pure azure near the zenith. And a belt of

white around the horizon shone with a bright, satiny lustre.

The old she-bear could see mother bears and their cubs converging upon the whale carcass; it was time for the evening meal. She enjoyed these leisurely affairs. This carcass, cast adrift during the previous September, was a magnet that drew polar bears from every point of the compass: Males, females, this year's cubs, and last year's cubs. Two of the old males were always on guard. Mothers and youngsters came and went every day.

OO-LIK, as the progeny of an established matron, always touched noses with the visiting cubs of his own age. Now, as he and his mother stood there, an old she-bear, cream-white and unkempt, and her snow-white cub arrived. Nanook greeted the mother bear and led her to the carcass; Oo-lik fell in behind them to welcome the little female cub. They touched noses; then they stopped and investigated each other, like a couple of airedales. The scent of the dainty stranger recalled to Oo-lik an experience of several weeks before on the mainland: This was the little lady-bear that had boxed his ears! Noatak remembered, too: At their first meeting (while their mothers were asleep nearby), Oo-lik had demonstrated his prowess as a hunter; he had killed a lemming.

Now, reunited, Oo-lik and Noatak wandered aimlessly over the ice. Since their appetite for meat had not been fully awakened, the carcass held no interest for them. In their ramble Oo-lik led, as befitted the male of the species, and Noatak followed. Eventually he found himself at the end of a narrow strip of ice, two or three feet above the surface of the water. There was no room for Noatak to follow. With considerable ostentation he gazed at the opposite ice field, sniffed the air, and looked all about him—as he had seen his mother do. Then, for some unaccountable reason, Oo-lik glanced straight down into the water. And there, in the calm, gray-green depths, he was amazed to see a fuzzy white replica—on a much smaller scale—of his mother!

Who was this interloper? Was he about to take Noatak from him? Angered at the mere thought of such a possibility, Oo-lik bared his teeth in challenge; the cub in the water did the same. Oo-lik gathered his feet under him, and sat back on his haunches, ready to spring—and the other disappeared. It was the cub's first experience with water, the mirror of nature.

Convinced that his bold front had frightened the newcomer away, Oo-lik peeped over the edge of the floe. There was the intruder staring up at him! Gripping the ice with his tiny black claws, the cub, with his slender white teeth gleaming, leaped at the throat of his "adversary." He would show Noatak that she could depend upon him for protection.

The disillusionment of the little white bear was instant and complete. Instead of finding the throat of the enemy between his snapping jaws, he choked and sputtered as a brackish liquid filled his mouth. In the melted-snow pools, the water was sweet to the taste; this water was bitter. It closed over his head; some of the salt water trickled down into his lungs. Oo-lik was terrified. There was a roaring in his ears as he sank.

The cub opened his eyes under water, but he could see nothing. The sun, that unfailing source of light, was shining. Above him the water was a light green. He looked upward, instinctively held his breath, and lashed out with all four paws, dog-fashion. And the salt water, for some reason unknown to Oo-lik, buoyed him up; it was easier to swim in. His roly-poly body, with its ample layer of fat, came quickly to the surface.

Frightened and dismayed, and not a little chagrined at the spectacle he had made of himself before the delectable Noatak, he looked about for the strange cub he thought he had seen in the water. There was no other creature in sight except his companion—and she seemed to be highly amused at his predicament. This wounded his pride still further. Nevertheless, he paddled industriously to keep himself afloat. Nor were his efforts in vain; he quickly discovered that the wide, flat feet which Nature had provided were carrying him toward the ice; that the inclination of his head to the right or left automatically steered him in that direction.

Finding that he was making progress, Oo-lik swam all the more strenuously.

## HISTORIC BRIDGE

*The eastern parts of Bering Sea and Bering Strait are so shallow that if the sea level had been lowered two hundred feet—or the land raised two hundred feet—Siberia and Alaska would have been connected by a land bridge five hundred miles wide.*

*Scientists believe the elevation and sinking of this part of the ocean floor has occurred several times. According to a number of indications, it was along this route that the early ancestors of the American Indian migrated from northeastern Asia; also the ancestors of the wapiti (erroneously known as the elk), mountain sheep, bison, mammoth, mastodon, bears, cats, and other animals. By the same route the ancestors of the horses, camels, and dogs, (which apparently originated in the Americas) reached the Old World.*

Once he had gained the "shore" of this perilous sea—a sloping ice-shelf—he struggled to the top, shook the water from his fur, and walked straight past the astonished Noatak, with his nose in the air. No matter how admirable her physical qualities, thought he, he was through with a female cub who could stand there, calm and unruffled, while he was struggling for his very life!

But the very feminine little Noatak had seen in Oo-lik qualities that she greatly admired, and she was not going to lose him.

Putting her pride in her pocket, as it were, she headed Oo-lik off, and licked his nose. She tried to make clear to the wrathful cub that at no time had she been indifferent to his welfare; that she thought he was the strongest and bravest cub she had ever seen. Considerably mollified, Oo-lik slowed up.

The two mother bears had retired for the night, and the cubs were still walking about in a circle, tramping down the snow on which they would lie, when the quiet of their Arctic domain was disturbed and the mother bears roused by a sound that all knew only too well—the firing of rifles!

EARLY IN the evening Capt. Matt Erickson, of the trading schooner *North Wind,* had climbed the long snow-drift that led to the top of his log cabin. Visibility was better than it had been all spring. Four miles across the tundra, where the foothills began, he could see with the aid of his spyglass half a dozen caribou feeding up the valley. A hundred yards below the cabin, on the eastern shore of the lagoon, his schooner was hauled up on the beach. On the western shore, a mile distant, Toot-lurak's driftwood shack stood out against the white background. To the northward the drifting pack seemed to be devoid of all life.

Life on the Arctic coast had been profitable for Capt. Matt and his brother, Nels, but rather monotonous. Except during the summer trading season, no white men—and few Eskimos—came that way. It was Capt. Matt's custom to take a look around the horizon with the ship's telescope each night just before he retired. Sitting atop his snow-covered cabin, with his elbows resting on his knees and his heels dug into the snow, the grizzled fur-trader slowly and methodically swept the white horizon with his glass.

At a point a little east of north the Captain blinked his eyes: Something had moved! That something could only be a polar bear—and hides were worth a hundred dollars apiece. Again he swept the surface of the off-shore ice until he reached the spot: There was nothing but a jumble of hummocks. However, that proved nothing; a bear could disappear behind an ice cake in a few seconds. He finished his survey of the drifting pack, came back to the spot a little east of north, braced himself, and again leveled his telescope. This time there could be no doubt about it: On a hummock, three or four miles from shore, stood a huge polar bear. He was on guard; so (reasoned the trader) there must be others.

Capt. Matt did not shout; he knew that under certain conditions in the Arctic, loud voices could be heard at a distance of eight or ten miles. Slithering down the side of the snowdrift, he opened the cabin door and called softly: "Nels!" Together they climbed to the top of the cabin, and the trader handed his brother the telescope and pointed. A cursory glance was enough for Nels; he nodded.

Silently they went to the driftwood rack, where their kayaks were kept out of the

reach of Toot-lurak's dogs. They took down the two frail craft, slipped a couple of boxes of .30-'06 cartridges into their snow-shirt pockets, picked up their rifles from the storm shed, raised their kayaks to their shoulders, and headed for the ice. Half a mile from shore they found the open lead that eventually brought them to the whale carcass. It was the first lane of water they had seen all winter.

Nanook, lying flat on her paunch, peered over the top of the ridge. Noatak and her mother already were in full retreat; the first shot had thoroughly frightened them. But Nanook felt certain that, for the moment, she and her cub were safer where they were. The old males that were on guard had been killed; now the hunters were creeping toward the whale carcass. Here and there a bear that had not heard the first shots was killed as he slept.

The two brothers took up their stand about fifty yards from the carcass. A four-year-old backed out of a tunnel, filled to repletion with blubber and meat, and headed for a soft bed in the snow; Nels cut him down with a bullet just back of the shoulder. From behind the whale another bear appeared; he, too, was shot down. Other animals that were asleep in the general vicinity leaped to their feet and started running; at least a dozen of them were killed. These bears were awakened by the fusillade; but the animals that were eating their way into the carcass could hear no outside noises. As they emerged, each from his separate cavern, they were shot down.

In the three months of his existence, Oo-lik had learned to remain absolutely quiet and inconspicuous in an emergency, and wait for a signal from his mother. When the slaughter had reached the stage where she could bear the sight no longer—and was sure the hunters were fully occupied—she backed away from the top of the ridge and slid to the bottom, with her cub following close behind. The scene of the carnage lay to the westward; Nanook led the way to the eastward between two pressure ridges. She had been mistaken in thinking that she and her cub were beyond the danger zone; polar bears were never safe from the two-legged creatures, white or brown, who carried smoke-sticks.

In her fourteen years, the mother bear had always been able to escape from dogs and men by putting a body of water between herself and her pursuers. Now she welcomed the sight of a narrow lane of open water. She had spent twenty per cent of her life, perhaps, in the water—and her cub would do likewise. But at the beginning of his uncertain existence he preferred to stay on the ice. His recent experience had reassured him on one point: He could swim, in a fashion. But he could still taste salt water—and hear the roaring in his ears as he sank.

Nanook descended to the water's edge, expecting Oo-lik would follow. Instead, he sat at the edge of the ice field, and whimpered. She started to fetch him. Anticipating her purpose, the cub hid among the ice cakes. Very well, the mother thought; she would go on without him. She slipped into the icy water and swam to the other side of the lead. This (to Oo-lik) uncalled-for exhibition of maternal hard-heartedness brought a plaintive wail from the cub. On the opposite side, his mother endeavored, by every known subterfuge, to induce him to swim across; she knew he was capable of the task. She "hunted" lemmings; that brought no movement by the cub. She scraped away the ice and snow from an imaginary seal-hole, and crouched beside it. Neither stratagem brought Oo-lik any nearer; he was still afraid of the water. Finally, the mother bear turned her back on him and disappeared over a ridge.

## WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

*With the Eskimos there is no sex difference in names. Moreover, two persons of the same name may not get married. Stefanson reports the dire results of such a marriage in Arctic Canada: The woman was from Point Hope, Alaska; and the man from the Mackenzie Delta. A week or two after they were married someone discovered that among their unused names they had one in common. In the land of the Eskimo this constituted a local scandal of considerable magnitude. And, although the two were quite fond of each other, and were prepared to disregard the unwritten law, they were forced by public opinion to separate. And for the time being, at least, both the man and the woman, although entirely innocent, lost much of the good opinion of the Eskimo village.*

## BIGGER THAN YOU THINK!

*If a map of Alaska were superimposed upon one of the United States drawn to the same scale, Pt. Barrow, the northernmost tip, would touch the boundary line between Minnesota and Canada; Attu, the most westerly island in the Aleutian chain, would be between Los Angeles and San Francisco; and Cape Fox, the southernmost point of Alaska, would be in the vicinity of Savannah, Georgia.*

*Cape Prince of Wales, Alaska, the most westerly point of the mainland of North America, is some four hundred miles west of Honolulu. Attu Island is almost due north of New Zealand.*

Even this threat to abandon him did not have the desired effect. Sitting on his haunches, the wretched little cub pointed his nose into the air, and whimpered. The old she-bear, humiliated by this lack of courage in her offspring, in whose veins flowed the blood of a thousand Arctic kings, reappeared. With ill-concealed impatience she swam back to the cub, and indicated, in peremptory fashion, that he was to grip her tail in his teeth—and hang on. Oo-lik knew when his mother had reached the end of her patience: He permitted himself to be towed across the lead.

All that night they trudged to the eastward. A light wind blew obliquely across their faces. At length, a half-mile lead cut off their advance. Nanook raised her long,narrow head, with its stubby rounded ears and Roman nose, and looked long and searchingly out over the unruffled sea. Drab clouds were beginning to form against the distant sky. The snow-covered ridges glinted like frosted jewelry in the morning sunlight. She would take a nap; perhaps by the middle of the morning the lead would close.

During the long Arctic night, which began early in October, the seals had been cooped up in their dark, chill dungeons; now they basked for hours each day in the sun. It was as though they were trying to store up enough heat in their plump bodies to last them through the coming winter.

From her vantage point atop a hummock, the old she-bear could see a number of black dots within a radius of half a mile. Seals! She licked her chops at the thought of a meal of juicy blubber and delicious red meat. Whale meat was tough and fibrous; seal meat was even better than year-old walrus. Besides, there was her cub to consider: Oo-lik was by nature a carnivore; this would be a good opportunity to get him accustomed to eating meat. It was a bother to nurse him several times a day—and the more meat he ate, the less milk he would require. Most important of all, it was high time Oo-lik were learning to stalk the animal that, in the years which lay ahead, would provide him with nine meals out of every ten.

THERE WERE four recognized methods of hunting the hair seal, and Nanook was familiar with the technique of each method; she had had plenty of experience. In the winter she smelled out a seal's breathing hole, scraped away the upper layer of snow and ice, and hooked him with her sharp claws as he came up to breathe. In the spring, when seals lay beside their holes in the ice, she sneaked up to them, hiding behind ice cakes until she got near enough to make a final dash. In both spring and summer she swam silently along an open lead, searching for a seal that lay near the edge of the ice, and cutting off his escape to the open water. And she varied this technique by leaping into the water and killing any seal that might venture within fifteen feet of the ice. There were variations of all these.

The most difficult task was to stalk a seal that was lying alongside its slippery runway. For it required only a couple of seconds for the animal to disappear down the chute into the icy water below. That was her problem now. She watched the nearest seal. So far as she was concerned, he was quite safe. In the first place, he lay on a spot that was level for a hundred yards in every direction. There was no opportunity for her to sneak up on him. At least every half minute, on the average, the seal raised its head from the ice, looked about for his natural enemy, the polar ear, then lowered his head for another nap. Even when the seal's head was resting on the ice, the slightest sound—even the stealthy approach of a polar bear—would be transmitted to its keen ears.

For ice is a good conductor of sound.

Off to the left of this crafty seal, however, was one that appeared to be lying very close to the edge of the ice. Could she intercept him?

Placing a heavy paw on Oo-lik, and indicating that she wanted him to stay in that very spot, the old she-bear slipped into the open lead and swam with the powerful, noiseless, and efficient crawl stroke of her species, with her black-tipped nose barely out of the water. At a point about a hundred yards from her intended victim, she began to swim under water, close to the edge of the ice, for about fifteen yards—then come to the surface to breathe. In this fashion, alternately diving and planing to the surface for air, she made her final approach. When her sense of timing told her she had arrived opposite the basking seal, she waded noiselessly up an incline, raised her head slowly, and peered over the edge of the ice: The seal was taking a nap—but he was thirty yards farther on!

Nanook returned to the water and paddled another thirty yards. At this spot the edge of the ice was about four feet above the water. From it there jutted out under the water a sloping shelf. Experience had taught her that in all likelihood she would find such a tongue; in fact, it was a necessary adjunct to her strategic plan. She emerged from the water and rose cautiously to her hind feet: *The seal was staring straight at her!*

The old she-bear did not betray her presence; there was such a thing as looking at an object without actually seeing it. Perhaps the seal had heard her sloshing up the incline, and was looking for the source of the noise. Behind her cream-white fur was a background of white. She let her eyelids droop slowly over her dark eyes, lowered her black snout a couple of inches, and gradually withdrew. With infinite patience she stood there on all fours for at least ten minutes.

The sluggish seal was no match for the polar bear's superior intelligence, experience, and strength. Instinct, training, and the accumulated knowledge of the species dictated that he dive into his hole at the slightest noise, no matter whence it came, on the assumption that it could have been made by a polar bear. Instead, he had heard a slight noise; had looked up without seeing anything out of the ordinary; and had assumed that his imagination was playing a trick upon him. When he raised his head for the tenth time in as many minutes, he was confronted by the Great White Tigress of the Arctic. The seal rose awkwardly upon his flippers, and swung his head in the direction of his hole. His soft brown eyes blinked for an instant.

But the seal had delayed too long. The old she-bear swung her right forepaw in an arc, like a hand-ball player—and knocked the seal clear of the ice. Pouncing upon him, she held the wriggling animal with both forepaws, sank her sabre-like teeth into his upper neck, brought her powerful jaws together, and clamped down upon the seal's vertebrae. Her thought, at the moment, was divided between the firm resolve to teach Oo-lik the elements of hunting—and the desire for food. She hoped the cub had been watching.

Nanook stripped away the blubber as we eat Golden Bantam corn—with this exception: She snipped off the layer of blubber as a beaver goes around a tree, not in horizontal fashion, before she began to eat the lean meat. And not until she had eaten thirty pounds, in all, did she stop to fetch her cub. Oo-lik was proud to be the son of so great a huntress. She stripped off small bits of meat, and urged him to eat them. Then she stretched out on the ice; a full meal always made her drowsy.

Oo-lik glanced toward the remains of their seal, and was astounded to see the carcass literally covered with sea gulls. The temerity of these scavengers, helping themselves to his mother's kill! He dashed over to the carcass—and missed by only

## LONG HAUL

*Many shore birds that occur in the United States have their summer homes and breeding ground in Alaska. One, the Pacific golden plover, nests in Alaska and winters from the Hawaiian Islands southward in the islands of Polynesia, making a non-stop flight between the North American mainland and the Hawaiian Islands, a distance of at least 2,300 miles.*

a few inches the tail feathers of the last gull to get into the air. The Arctic vultures circled about, screeching and squawking, but Oo-lik paid no attention. He was a big bear now; gulls and foxes were beneath his notice.

Every day, it seemed, brought to his attention some new phenomenon. He was lying, half asleep, alongside his mother when he became aware of a sound that he had never heard. His mother noticed it, too, and raised her head. The noise was so foreign to her Arctic world, and so insistent and menacing in tone, that she sprang to her feet, prepared either to flee or to fight. But if this was an enemy, it was an intangible one; there was nothing in sight. The noise, however, grew in volume. She inclined her head to the right, and then to the left, and pricked up her stubby ears, but the source of the strange noise eluded her. The cub was intrigued by the sound, too; and a little bit frightened. Faintly there came to his sensitive ears a whirring, droning noise. It rose and fell, like the waves of the sea.

The cub had never heard a mosquito's vibrating wings; he had left the land too early in the spring. But in previous summers hundreds of the pests had buzzed about the old she-bear's head. She had even seen a herd of caribou dash into the sea to free themselves of swarms of these parasites. Could there be swarms of mosquitoes high above the sea ice? For that was where the throbbing sound-waves seemed to be coming from. Somewhere in the sky there was a potent force that buzzed and hummed with increasing power. And it was coming closer and closer!

For a moment Nanook actually was frightened—as all of us, since the days of the Stone Age, have been afraid of the unknown. This was not the sharp crack of a rifle, nor the cracking of the ice; she was familiar with such sounds. It had a vibrant quality, as if the very atmosphere were being shattered by some powerful means. Oo-lik sensed his mother's agitation, and hid himself under her belly. Mother and cub remained motionless, as if they were awaiting the end of the world. Instinct told the old she-bear to flee into the water, and hide under a projecting slab of ice. Instead, impelled by a curiosity stronger than any she had ever known, Nanook merely stood there, fascinated by the steadily increasing roar.

The dreaded thing drew nearer; she could now locate the source of the sound-waves. They came from the sky. She peered into the distant blue of space and saw, glinting in the rays of the sun, a silver-colored cylinder, with pointed nose and tail, cleaving its way through the sky with the speed of a Canada goose. Strangest of all, it had no wings! It was longer than a dozen whales, placed end to end. It was as light and buoyant as a snowy owl, and soared through the sky with as little effort as the merciless king of the air. It seemed to disminish in size as it soared to the southward, and the humming sound grew fainter, until at last the strange craft became a mere dot in the sky. Mother bear and cub looked at each other in mute astonishment.

OVERHEAD, on warm winds from the south, came myriads of geese, filling the air with their raucous clamor. Most of the leaders of the "V" formations set a course along the coast, flying low and disappearing into the northeast; others followed zig-zag lanes of open water. A few, with some distant—perhaps undiscovered—land as their goal, swung directly out to sea. Oo-lik's curiosity was stimulated by these migrating flocks, with their honkers and their self-discipline. He sat on his haunches, watching the geese until they disappeared from sight, wondering how there could be so many winged creatures in the world; and how they could generate the power that propelled them through the air. He couldn't fly—nor could his mother!

Nanook, however, long since had ceased to wonder about such abstract things. Her daily problems were food, sleep, and the protection of her cub. Her sleep had been interrupted by the coming of the mysterious ship of the air: now she went back to finish her nap.

Oo-lik was impatient with his mother for sleeping when there was so much to see in this spotless world of ice and snow. She never seemed to be in the mood for play; and, since he had no brother or sister, he was obliged to provide his

own amusement. And there wasn't much fun to be had on the sea ice; life was a daily struggle for existence. Of course, there was always the chance that he might see a seal!

The cub strayed off to the nearest fresh-water pond, drank his fill, dipped one foot experimentally into the water, and scampered through a shallow part of the pond. He wandered aimlessly over to the edge of the lead; perhaps a seal would poke its bulbous head up out of the sea! He sat there a long time, a lone and forlorn little figure. Suddenly he blinked: Floating lightly upon the calm surface of the lead was a strange craft, buoyant as an eider duck, but bigger than a hundred of them!

The boat, to the cub, was another phenomenon; it held an irresistible attraction. It came directly toward him, propelled by a small white sail. This hid the occupants of the skin-covered boat until the bow touched the ice; then it seemed to erupt little brown men. These were the two-legged creatures that had killed the polar bear on the tundra. True, these particular Eskimos carried no smoke-sticks, but they undoubtedly were dangerous.

There were four of them. Three branched out and encircled the cub, while the other swarmed up over the parapet, with a walrus-hide line in his hand. Frightened, Oo-lik whirled and scampered back to warn his mother. But the roly-poly little cub was quickly surrounded by the dark-skinned men. Before he could realize what had happened, a noose had dropped about his neck. Desperate at the thought of being separated from his mother, the cub reached up with his little forepaws and clawed the tightening raw-hide rope away from his throat. With the pressure on his wind-pipe momentarily released, Oo-lik gave voice to his lustiest squeal. The Eskimos, alarmed at the prospect of an awakened mother bear appearing in their midst, quickly hog-tied the cub's feet, tossed him into the bottom of the boat, lowered the sail, took their seats, and paddled madly toward the mainland. The oldest of the four men sat in the stern, holding the cub's mouth shut with one hand and steering with the other.

Oo-lik's frantic cry for help had awakened the old she-bear. A terrifying picture of rage, she galloped awkwardly to the edge of the lead. One of the hunters laid his paddle aside and picked up his rifle. But the older man—the omalik—said: "No! The skin is worthless at this season; and the meat is tough." They went on.

Nanook, distracted at the thought of losing her precious cub, plunged into the water. She had seen the Eskimo take up his rifle, and she knew what havoc these weapons were capable of wreaking; she therefore kept a quarter of a mile astern of the umiak. When Oo-lik's captors paddled along the opposite edge of the lead, she clambered onto the ice and raced along the brink. Up one side of the ridges and down the other she raced, always keeping the skin-boat in sight. She scarcely looked where she was stepping; she had eyes only for her offspring. He had gotten himself into this predicament, but she blamed herself for failing to impress upon him the dangers that beset them on all sides, particularly when they were within a few miles of the mainland.

Now, apparently, it was too late: The distance between the mother bear and the umiak became greater and greater. Then the crafty omalik steered sharply into a haven under the edge of the land-fast ice, and remained hidden from sight for half an hour. The old she-bear passed the spot—and they let her go. The omalik still held Oo-lik's nose; he could give his mother no clue as to his whereabouts. Even the wind was not in her favor; it blew gently off the land . . .

Far in the distance, the hunters could see the pitiful figure of the mother bear, looking out across the lead. The figure grew smaller and smaller as it continued to the eastward, until it blended with the spotless white of the surrounding ice and snow.

## SMOOTH SAILING

*There are no icebergs in the Arctic Ocean north of Alaska for the simple reason that there are no glaciers in that region from which they can be discharged as there are in Greenland and southeastern Alaska.*

# *Where Hell Froze Over!*

## By AL STORM

**The ice-bound town of Blue Wash awaited melting from the hot lead of Silver Dick Porter's killers. Yet the wild, roaring celebration didn't cease . . . for no man, nor woman, could foretell the exact hour of retribution.**

THE SPRUCE was heeled over, half buried in the drifts. Snow-weighted boughs drooped low against the frozen crust, a pocket for hiding; and in the half-gloom, Art Seiller lay watching.

So far as he could determine, he wasn't being followed. Which meant nothing. Silver Dick Porter hadn't built his legend in the north country by working his hired killers in the open. No more than had he ever allowed a man to defy him and live long enough for men to wonder. And they were defying Porter now, Art Seiller knew, every man-jack of the little clan of miners who held claims along upper Menisso creek. Silver Dick Porter had them marked for retribution.

Seiller shivered and hitched the old 45-90 rifle under his arm. His fingers worked in the wolf skin mitts. His trail was plain across the virgin snow. Porter's killers would stay hidden until his vigilance relaxed. And then . . .

Steel-edged wind slanted across the ridge and Art Seiller shook himself. He rose to shove away from the spruce cover, leaning into the gale as he hurriedly crossed the open ridge. Not a large man, Art Seiller, but solid packed, his muscles hammered thin by the grueling demands of north country prospecting. He stopped just after entering the trees and looked back. But still he saw nothing. Abruptly he

L. Ravielli
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## HOOCHINOO

*The Raven branch of the Taku tribe of Indians is credited with having been the first to utilize kelp strands as a "worm" for making that particular brand of whiskey known all over Alaska as "hoochinoo", or just plain "hooch." They used to place a mixture of fermented molasses, flour, sugar, cornmeal or other cereal in a five-gallon kerosene tin. To the top of this was attached an old gun barrel.*

*The barrel passed through another tin filled with snow or ice-water and acted as a "worm" in a distillery. The fermented substances were heated, and the steam which arose from the mess was condensed in the "worm" and dripped out of the other end in the form of "hoochinoo." When gun barrels were not available, kelp, which is hollow, was used.*

*"Hoochinoo" is sometimes called "squirrel whiskey" because if a man drinks enough of it he becomes obsessed with the desire to climb a tree. In the old days it was manufactured in various grades known as "Nitric Acid", "Chain Lightning", "Snake Juice", and "Battle Axe" brands. Each brand was supposed to produce an entirely different effect.*

stopped, listening; but the ghost of sound had whipped away and he could hear nothing. He teased the hammer of his rifle and began drifting down the slope.

Wind soughed across the spruce tips overhead. He came to a packed deer-run and turned along it, the rifle held across his chest as he scanned the brakes and thickets for signs of a vagrant moose or black tail deer. Motion broke farther along the run and Seiller jerked the rifle to his shoulder.

A woman came half-running, half-walking along the packed snow. She was watching back across her shoulder. Her foot caught, she stumbled, and then she saw Art Seiller.

She stopped, staring at him while her lips trembled with the rush and pull of her breathing. Her eyes were wide, stark blue, in the flushed pink of her countenance. A worn cloth coat was pulled tight about her, but she was without mukluks or boots. And she was afraid. Seeing her fright, Seiller lowered his rifle with a strange sense of guilt.

"Will—will you please let me past?" the woman panted. "I—"

Seiller stepped out of the run into the thigh-deep snow, floundering around so that he stood facing her. She started past him, and he could see the fatigue that dragged at her every movement.

"There's nothing beyond the ridge but a lot of cold wind," he warned. "You ain't dressed for it. If you're headed for Blue Wash, you'd better rest. Tired as you are, if you go down you'll freeze before you ever get up."

THE WOMAN'S glance touched him but she kept moving as though his meaning escaped her. He reached out suddenly and grabbed her. She sobbed, struggling against him. But her strength had been spent and she sagged into his arms crying her despair.

"Here," Seiller said gruffly. "I ain't the one for harming you. But it's rest you need, and a calming, or you'll never cross that ridge."

The sweet smell of her reached upward to his nostrils, breathing a yearning upon his thoughts. His arms tightened. All the long years of loneliness crowded in upon him, the longing for respect and adulation and love that lies in all men. He held her overlong, reluctant to loosen his hold even after she had ceased trying to pull away.

"It's nigh onto seven miles beyond that ridge to Blue Wash," he said finally.

He could feel her stiffen beneath his arm. She twisted away from him, eyes blazing. "I'm not going to Blue Wash—ever!"

Seiller stared blankly. Beyond Silver Dick Porter's town of Blue Wash there was nothing but a winter-pinched wilderness of Sawatchi mountains.

"You're a fool," he said roughly. "Either a fool or plumb crazy. Ain't no fitten place for a man in this country other'n Blue Wash. It ain't rightly fitten but at least it's shelter for a woman."

Her hand slapped across his mouth, stinging his lips. He could feel the warmth of running blood. The woman followed, clawing for his eyes, as he stumbled back; and he flung up his arm to ward her off. The abrupt show of savagery startled and angered him. And then as suddenly her fury was spent. She stood white-faced, mute, staring beyond him along the deer-run.

Art Seiller swore. "By heck! I've half

a mind to take you—"

"You ain't taking her nowhere," a man's voice cut in. "She's mine and she's going back with me. If you want her, be in Blue Wash; you'll get your chance."

Art Seiller twisted awkwardly in the deep snow. A paunch-bellied man stood a scant twenty feet down the deer-run. Rolls of frost-whited gristle pouched his eyes. His arms were hidden in the folds of a long caribou coat. The woman began making little whimpering noises in her throat.

"Come here, Nancy," the fat man said.

When the woman did not move, the fat man repeated the order, quieter, with an edged ruthlessness that stirred the hackles along Art Seiller's neck.

"Reckon she's free to come and go as she pleases," he said stiffly.

The fat man's lips laughed, but his eyes were brittle cold. He walked closer until his breath was a cloud of steam blowing in Art Seiller's face.

"All right, Nancy," the man said. "Start back down that trail, but remember—every step you take leaves a plain print for me to follow. I'd hate to get rough."

The woman still stood stubbornly. The fat man reached out and gave her a shove that sent her reeling. Art Seiller opened his mouth. The fat man's hands came up swiftly, wresting the rifle from Art Seiller's grasp. A hunched shoulder smashed into Seiller's chest. He staggered back. Knuckles slammed into his face, and then the butt of his own rifle, and he fell, fighting against the flood of crimson that filled his sight.

## II

COLD WAS working into him, gnawing the marrow of his bones, when he finally blinked at the spruce boughs overhead. Painfully he lifted his head. His body hadn't numbed, so he judged that but scant minutes had passed since the fat man had felled him. He got to his feet fighting a dizzy spell that left him weak and shaken. His face was a scrambled mass of torn flesh, he could tell by the feel. But the bleeding had almost stopped.

The woman and the fat man were gone. He found his rifle and found that it was still fully loaded. Turning, he started back up the slope, then stopped. His eyes swept along the deer-run. That woman had been afraid of the fat man, hadn't wanted to go with him. Slowly Art Seiller came back down the slope. Excitement lifted the tempo of his breathing as he contemplated taking the woman from the fat man.

The trees thinned to an open valley. Seiller stopped, holding to the cover of the spruce and tamarack while he studied the situation. Two pair of tracks angled away from the deer-run and crossed to the four boxed-in wagons that stood on the far slope.

Smoke rose from tin stove-pipes; half a dozen men were there, and some women, he saw. But there was no sign of the fat man nor of the woman called Nancy.

A sickishness began to grow in the pit of his stomach as he stared at the encampment.

He had been a fool, a stupid, impetuous fool. That fat man had been Fluff Mohagknot, Silver Dick Porter's partner.

Seiller turned away and began moving back up the slope. He held a handful of snow against his throbbing eye. Before long the whole north country would be laughing; he'd tried to rescue one of Fluff Mohagknot's women. He kicked viciously at the snow, bitterness sour in his mouth. But his memory held the image of stark blue eyes, the trembling of soft lips. He cursed aloud. A Fluff Mohagknot woman!

### OTTER ROT

*On the Liard River, a tributary of the Mackenzie, there were, in the old days, Indians who frowned upon (and this is an understatement) the killing of land otters. For, the Indians believed, the spirit of the dead otter, having no place to go, entered the body of a squaw and turned her into a witch.*

*In this connection, there is a rather grim record of two French-Canadian trappers. They came along the Liard one summer, stopped at the Hudson's Bay Co. post, and sold the factor, among other things, five land-otter pelts.*

*Whether or not the two trappers knew of the Indian belief is not known. But according to the records, the two trappers were never heard from again; they just disappeared. And on the next hunting expedition of the Indians, five squaws did not come back.*

MOHAGKNOT'S business was well known to all the north country. For top bid at a widely publicized auction, any man could buy a woman to tend his cabin and tidy his clothes. Fluff Mohagknot brought them in by the wagon load, and in the wild and womanless frontier mining camps they sold fabulously. Whether the women stayed more than a day after Mahagknot left town was problematical; some did, more didn't, but no man held that against Fluff Mohagknot. At least none dared try getting his money back. Fluff Mohagknot and Silver Dick Porter were a pair men just didn't argue with.

The sun was low in a scudding haze when Art Seiller came into sight of the cook fires along upper Menisso creek. His legs were leaden with fatigue. A miner saw his bloody features and called out. More men came running. In a matter of minutes half the Independents were ringed about him.

"Porter's men got ye?" old Jersey Meadows guessed.

Seiller shook his head. "Fell in some rocks," he lied. "Seen nothing of Porter's men, nor deer, neither."

He wasn't believed, but he was too tired to care. Men stared at his torn features and then at each other, mutely questioning his evasiveness. Even old Jersey Meadows stood silent, waiting for him to speak. When he said nothing, a man at the back of the crowd said, "Something's fishy, by heck."

"We got us a claim jumper, Art," old Jersey Meadows said slowly. "We're taking him in to Porter. Reckon ye'd want to come along?"

Art Seiller's head jerked. "Into Blue Wash? Hell, man, that's just plain asking Silver Dick Porter to start cutting us down."

"Maybe ye got a better idea?"

There was no escaping the ring of prying eyes. Men of the upper Menisso diggings were hanging together, hoping that their combined strength would prevail against Porter's wrath. Yet in each was the suspicion, the fear that he would be caught alone, that betrayal from within would wreck the union they now afforded. That fear and that suspicion now ringed Art Seiller, condemning him with each second that he held silent.

"All right, men," Seiller said against his better judgement. "I'm with you. But we'll only get our heads shot off by going into Blue Wash."

Somewhere a man laughed, a mocking, grating slip of sound that betokened taut nerves.

"We got to find out sometime," Jersey Meadows said bluntly. "Either Silver Dick Porter or us—one of us has got to go."

## III

SIX MEN and Art Seiller came down the frozen rutted street of Blue Wash mining camp, six ragged, bewhiskered miners from their claims along upper Menisso creek. The eighth man wasn't a miner, wasn't following. He was being carried . . . dead.

Men along the corduory walks turned to stare uneasily as the grim cavalcade moved up from the creek and stopped before the Silver Queen Saloon. The dead man was tossed to the walk beneath the gilted doors. No man spoke. Taut hush gripped the town and lay like a weight stifling all breathing as the saloon doors opened. Silver Dick Porter took one short step outside. He came to a stand with his polished boots touching the body of the dead claim-jumper.

"Another of your claim-jumpers, Porter!" Old Jersey Meadows raised his voice until it rang the full length of the street. "We made him talk some afore he died. He said you hired him!"

For a long moment, Jersey Meadows waited for Porter's denial. When none came, he went on: "You made your section of this camp into the town of Blue Wash; it takes your orders and pays you tribute. But we of upper Menisso ain't going to. We done told you that before. Upper Menisso don't need to pay you anything for protection, not as long as we've got rifles and picks and men willing to fight for what's rightfully theirs."

Silver Dick Porter's cadaverous features never changed. If he realized that word of this open defiance was already winging through the camp, he didn't let on. He stood spread legged, filling the saloon doorway from lintel to sill, emotionless, frozen. His eyes flicked across the group as though carefully tabulating each man

## THE FLOOD

*Like most aborigines, the Indians of Alaska have a legend of a flood which once covered the earth. Clam shells, found in the high gravel of the hills in many parts of the Territory are pointed to in verification of the legend.*

*The flood, according to tradition, devastated the country, and the Indians paddled away in their boats in every direction. When the waters subsided, they settled wherever they happened to be at the time, and formed new relationships with the various tribes. This theory accounts for the wide separation of families related by blood and having the same totems.*

## STAMPEDE

*In 1848 the first whaling ship entered the Arctic. She was the bark "Superior," with Capt. Roys in command. During the summer the ship was loaded with whalebone (from the mouth of the bowhead or "right" whale); and with whale oil.*

*The return of the "Superior" to the United States with her fabulously rich cargo created a sensation among shipowners. The next year 154 whaling vessels passed through Bering Strait; they brought back with them 2,500,000 pounds of whalebone and more than 200,000 barrels of oil.*

*In later years the whalers turned to killing walrus for their ivory, hides, and oil. In a single decade, according to the estimate of the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries, 100,000 walrus were killed. Many Eskimo families starved in consequence, for the walrus and the whale were their main source of food.*

for his own private and personal attention. Watching him, Seiller for the first time became aware of the colorful poster advertising Fluff Mohagknot's coming auction of beautiful women.

"There's a man with a rifle behind each window and three upstairs," Silver Dick Porter said softly. "One word from me and none of you will live another ten seconds."

The miners stirred, peering apprehensively at the gaudy saloon. Seiller was unhearing. Blindly he stared at the auction poster, feeling again the soft warmth his arms had so briefly and fleetingly known.

"YOU'VE killed three of my men," Silver Dick Porter said. "Maybe the law should step in and clean out upper Menisso creek. Seems to be too many killings happening along that stretch of creek."

Old Jersey Meadows snorted defiantly. "Your law is town law, Porter. You said so yourself when ye declared us without protection when we wouldn't pay off. Ye invited every hoodlum north o' Flume Creek to take a free crack at us. Don't try crowdin' now—"

"Vigilantes aren't bounded by town limits," Porter purred. "When Fluff Mohagknot gets here—"

Art Seiller stiffened, enflamed by a rage he couldn't define. Emotion building within him at sight of the auction poster and memory of the woman snatched from his arms snapped at mention of fat Fluff Mohagknot. He yelled crazily and leaped at Porter. The saloonman fell back. Seiller's clawing hand fastened in Porter's brocaded vest. A 45-90 rifle barrel ground deep in the saloon-man's belly.

"You and Fluff Mohagknot!" Seiller half sobbed. "You're above the law. You can take a man's gold, or his life, or his woman. You can take what you want and no man dares argue, is that it, Porter?" Seiller twisted the rifle barrel. "Well, I can be ruthless too, Porter. I can blow your guts all over the front of your fancy saloon and you can't stop me! Can't anything stop me, not even your rifle-killers in those windows!"

Old Jersey Meadows' jaw slackened. Porter blanched white. A miner's breath wheezed audibly in the frosted air.

"Get moving, Jersey," Seiller called out. "You boys amble down toward the creek. Won't nobody take a shot at you. Won't, will there, Mr. Porter?"

The gouging rifle barrel forced a grudging shake of the head from Silver Dick Porter. The crowd watching from the log walks had grown, was growing even more, as word of Art Seiller going crazy swept the street. The upper Menisso miners turned away from the Silver Queen, stalking down the center of the street with rifles held ready. At the creek bank they hesitated, then took positions with only their heads and rifles showing. But they covered the street.

The humiliation would be more than Silver Dick Porter's prestige could stand.

Every man in Blue Wash was aware of that fact. The legend of invincibility had to be swiftly proven, Porter's revenge sudden and merciless, or his hold on the gold camp would be forever shaken. A man whose rule comes of fear can not be held with a rifle barrel in his belly. Let one man get away with it and a dozen more would try. The fear would be gone, the rule ended. And that, too, was known the length and breadth of Blue Wash.

Porter snarled suddenly and grabbed the rifle with both hands, wrenching the muzzle from his belly with a sound of tearing cloth. He yelled as he let go of the rifle and grabbed for his shoulder holster. Seiller crowded in close, jabbing convulsively with the rifle barrel. Porter gagged and fell, his face greening with the agony of his fight for wind.

Flinging himself against the saloon wall, Art Seiller scuttled along the building below the windows. A rifle blared overhead; splinters gashed his jaw. Then a second rifle boomed, this time from far down the street. A man within the saloon screamed. The scream slobbered into silence, and Seiller leaped into a doorway. He ran through the cafe, shoving past curious, frightened loafers and waiters. Thrusting through the back door, he went down the alley, hugging the buildings.

A long snow-churned opening stretched to the creek bank and he crossed at a dead run, hunching his shoulders and driving his legs desperately. A rifle slug lifted a long geyser of muck and then he was over the bank.

HEAVY SILENCE lay over the gold camp. With bated breath, men waited, knowing the dire consequence of opposing Silver Dick Porter's hired-killer might. Old Jersey Meadows spat and scratched himself nervously.

"That done 'er," he observed soberly. "Ain't a man-jack one of us will dare show his nose in Blue Wash now. Nor Menisso creek neither, soon's Porter can get his killers staked out with rifles." The old miner turned a curious look toward Seiller's battered features. "What'd ye jump him like that for, Seiller? We figured ye'd done busted yore head and had gone bush-crazy."

Seiller looked at the oldster, turning his attention slowly from man to man, seeing their fears and doubts and the strange awe with which they regarded him.

"You can just hate a man so much," he said slowly. "Then something's got to bust. I reckon I was about to the bustin' point."

A glumness gripped them, a fearing, and Art Seiller spoke out against it. "Show Blue Wash that you can stand on your own without paying Porter and Mohagknot anything and you'll have half the camp standing with you within ten days. Show that you're afraid and Porter'll have his killers scattering us out and picking us off one by one like ptarmigan." Seiller's bruised jaws clicked tight. "We ain't got a show unless we stick close together and not give Porter a chance to whittle us down."

A man nodded, but there was no confidence in him. "We got to try," was all he would say.

Seiller did not press the argument. He strode along in glum silence, neck pulled down inside the collar of his mackinaw. The fact that he was now a marked man meant nothing to him; all Menisso creek miners were marked men, had been since the day Silver Dick Porter first learned of the rich color showing in their sluice boxes. But his flare up. Had he jumped at Porter because of the claims along upper Menisso creek or because he had been thinking too much of the woman? He didn't know and he scowled to himself as he pondered the strange disquietude his brief encounter with her had brought him.

Men came to meet them as they turned along upper Menisso. Questions were called, answers given. But with the homeguard numbering some thirty men threatening and bragging, spirits lifted. Seiller sensed the resurge of confidence and he grinned at old Jersey Meadows.

"Come spring we ought to re-name Blue Wash, Jersey. That name carries an awful stink."

"Yeah," the oldster nodded. "Come spring. But we got to get some cartridges before then or it'll be us who'll be stinkin'."

ART SEILLER slapped him across the shoulders. "Tilly Mansock'll get cartridges to us. He don't like Porter any

better than we do."

"And grub?"

"Same way. We'll take turns hunting back in the Sawatchi mountains for meat. The rest Tilly can sneak in to us at night."

Upper Menisso braced itself and waited, rifles ready. But the night wore into a day, and another, and a third, without Porter's hirelings showing themselves. Art Seiller scowled blackly. Porter wasn't lying down; that he knew. And the certainty added fuel to his mounting unease.

That third night a clatter of rifle fire and wild yelling woke him. Pausing only long enough to pull on pants and mackinaw over his underwear, he grabbed up his rifle. Flame was showing a red glare across the gulch and he ran toward it. The shooting had stopped.

"Kerosene—" a man was shouting. "Doused the logs of Penny Goshen's cabin 'nd touched 'er off. Don't reckon Penny got out."

Seiller stopped just beyond the edge of firelight. He stared into the holocaust, remembering fat, jolly Penny Goshen. Anger took hold of him, and a hatred for Silver Dick Porter that rasped like a metal burr in his voice.

"Who done the shooting?"

"Seen one o' them makin' off after Penny's cabin lit up," old Jersey Meadows said. "He's layin' over t'other side that spruce stump."

Making certain that Porter's hirelings had been routed, Seiller approached the stump. He bent over the dead man, then straightened, his face set and iron hard in the flickering light.

"Tilly Mansock," he said. "Got his hands tide."

A miner swore hoarsely and then it was quiet, only the snapping crackle of wind-whipped fire sounding. Jersey Meadows turned away and walked into the darkness. He had come from the States with Tilly Mansock, roamed and combed the Sawatchis with him before they settled along the Menisso.

"We ain't whipped yet," Seiller said aloud.

"No, nor starved, neither," a miner mumbled. "But how long'll it be afore we are?"

There was no answer and the miners moved slowly back to their scattered cabins

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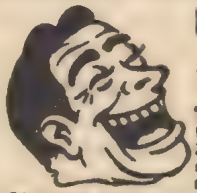

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and huts along the frozen creek. Art Seiller stood staring into the glowing embers of the burned cabin.

## IV

THE CHILL of his mood followed him to his own cabin, dark as the shadows that defied his kerosene lamp. He kindled a fire and warmed a pot of coffee. Somewhere in the night a man called aloud and he tensed, listening. But the cry was not repeated and he settled down again.

Nancy, Mohagknot had called her. A smile twisted his lips, splitting the cracked flesh and bringing a smart of pain. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and sat staring at the dark stain left on his wrist.

Jersey Meadows came in without knocking, gruff and perfunctory. "Baldy sneaked into Blue Wash to buy grub," he said soberly. "He ain't back yet."

Seiller swore aloud. He shrugged into his mackinaw, pausing only to slip a stub-barrel Colt .44 into his side pocket. The old man watched him silently. Neither spoke of the hazard of venturing into Blue Wash, but each was acutely aware of the danger. Seiller blew the lamp and stepped outside.

"If I ain't back come daylight, you make them hang and rattle, Jersey. Once Porter gets a fist in here, there won't be a man of us left come next winter."

"We'll hang and rattle," Jersey Meadows promised. "That we'll do, Seiller. We'll hang and rattle."

Blue Wash was reared back and running wide open as always. Men surged about the long bars, trading their precious dust for a few hours of warmth and fellowship and careless laughter. And why not? Who knew when it would be gone? Or for that matter life itself?

Seiller moved slowly, keeping well toward the center of the frozen street where he could watch to both sides. He went up the center and then swung a wide circle that encompassed the hot-spots. He saw nothing of Mohagknot's wagons. The streets were deserted, he saw no man. Twice he visited cabins in his quest for Baldy Newton, slinking to the doors like a wolf afraid of being seen. Twice he was admitted reluctantly, fearfully, and twice he learned nothing.

"If Porter seen him, he's done," one bearded old miner said hoarsely. "Same's you 'nd me, if'n he sees us together."

Seiller went along the street until he came to the noisy, pretentious Silver Queen Saloon. He pushed through the door into the heat and stench of smoke and liquor and sweated woolens, stopping just inside.

"Seen Baldy Newton from upper Menisso?" he asked the door-guard.

The guard laughed. "Hell, he got kilt—" The man recognized Seiller, then, and he yelled, lifting a sawed-off shotgun from his lap. Seiller kicked the man's high stool from under him, sending him sprawling under the feet of the startled crowd. Seiller was out the door, slamming it behind him before men had time to more than gasp his name. All sound in the Silver Queen jolted to an abrupt stop. He fired once into the door jamb, warning Porter that he was watching the door. Shadows bunched and surged against the frosted windows with the silhouettes painted upon them, but the doors remained closed. Art Seiller laughed thinly and backed into the darkness.

The story would be sweeping the camp by morning, he knew. Every miner in Blue Wash would hear how Seiller had appeared in Silver Dick Porter's saloon; and of even more importance, how he had gotten away! Silver Dick Porter's prestige would take another beating. But Seiller didn't feel proud, or lucky, or triumphant. Baldy Newton was dead. And Fluff Mohagknot wasn't in Blue Wash. A glumness soured him as he followed the creek. Disappointment settled heavily across his shoulders, but whether because of Baldy Newton or his failure to locate the woman, he couldn't tell.

He was in his own cabin, hunched before the roaring stove, when Jerry Glanders walked in.

"Baldy's dead," Seiller said.

"Figured as much." The silence grew long, and then Glanders said, "I heared Mohagknot's due in tomorrow with a cargo that'll knock your eye out. I know you ain't much interested in women, Art, but I was wonderin' if maybe two or three of us—"

Seiller speared the young hopeful with

a sharp glance. "You reckon you'd live long enough to make a bid?"

Glanders' enthusiasm waned swiftly. He sat down and drew a worn pipe from his pocket. "Why don't we sneak in and kill Porter and Mohagknot?" he asked. "They got us livin' like wolves out here . . . skeered even to go to town for a drink o' whiskey or a bait of fresh beans."

Seiller didn't answer. Glanders smoked for a few minutes, then turned on him suddenly:

"You ain't sick, Art?"

Seiller shook his head. Glanders watched him covertly, eyeing the blood scabbed forehead, the smashed and swollen mouth.

"Reckon Mohagknot's just baiting Porter's trap with them women?" he ventured.

"A man's a damned fool who'll even think about a Mohagknot chippy!" Seiller flared. "A knot-headed damned fool! He ought—" He broke off suddenly, sharply aware that he had been shouting and that Jerry Glanders was staring at him with open mouth.

He cuffed his broken mouth with the back of his fist, bringing the blood again. He sat grinning through the red smear at Glanders, misery dark in his eyes; and Glanders hastily left the cabin.

DAY WAS a sooty half-light when Art Seiller left his cabin. He stepped around the crusty, frozen tailings dumpers, moving past the stubby hand-made sluice boxes. Menisso creek was blue-white with ice. Distant Sawatchi peaks lay hidden in gray haze.

He walked slowly, working a looseness into his stiffened muscles. Then he began jog trotting. The light grew stronger, became increasingly colder. He panted as he floundered through the snow, and then he found his old tracks and began following them.

The wind was a gale swooping across the ridge, flinging ice particles that sliced skin and eyes until he couldn't face it. He ducked his head and ploughed on, stumbling blindly down slope. He joined the deer-run. The imprints where he had struggled with the woman jolted his memory as he hurried past. It was a crazy thing he was doing, a foolish, long-chance gamble.

But the valley was empty. No wagons

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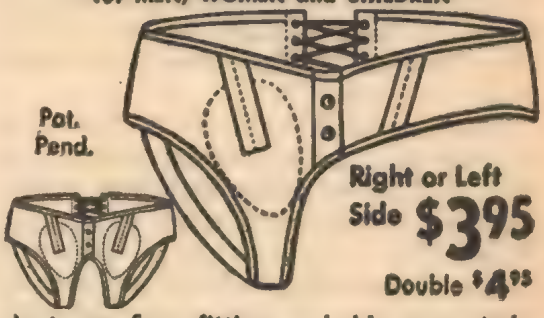


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showed. Fluff Mohagknot had moved his camp, and Art Seiller stood staring across the empty snow field dull eyed. Mohagknot would be in Blue Wash—and Nancy—and he would see her again only by going to the auction in Silver Dick Porter's saloon.

It was dark when Seiller got back to upper Menisso. The night was cold, but half a hundred men milled along the frozen creek.

"We found Baldy," Jersey Meadows told Seiller. "Hunk Portisher found him this morning, his head smashed in. We're aiming to talk to Porter about it . . . with rifles!"

Seiller stared along the twisted line of creek that had once been beautiful with trees. He stared at the fires built against the cold, the vigil of dirty unshaven, unwashed men to protect their own small pieces of frozen mud and ice-locked creek.

"Mohagknot get in?" he asked.

Somebody said that he had.

"Then Porter'll be in the Silver Queen waiting for us," Seiller said. "And so'll every man-jack miner in these diggings. Some of them'll side us in a show-down. I'll sneak in and—"

Old Jersey Meadows gawped. "Heck, Seiller! Porter is just itchin' for that very thing. We'll all go and bust 'er wide open. A lot of Blue Wash boys have been sneakin' out to join us. We kin—"

But Seiller wouldn't listen. He knew what would happen when upper Menisso men started crowding into the Silver Queen. Lead would fly; and somewhere in the melee would be a woman with stark blue eyes.

"I'm going," he said grimly. "If you hear any shooting, come on in. But I'm trying it alone first."

UPPER MENISSO men sifted into Blue Wash and scattered in a loose circle about the roaring, noisy Silver Queen Saloon. The auction was already in progress, and Seiller knew a sick uncertainty as he listened to the wild yells and profane laughter that came from the building.

"You're crazy, Seiller," Jersey Meadows argued. "Porter'll cut down on ye on sight!"

It was a fact which Seiller couldn't deny. They stood in the shadows on the far side of the street, watching the men push and shove to get into the saloon. For a long moment he hesitated, then walked closer to the saloon, coming to a stand to one side of the doors. So far as he could see from the outside, Porter had moved his door-guard. A horde of miners jammed the saloon.

Seiller burrowed into the in-pouring stream and let himself be carried inside. Fluff Mohagknot was rapping on the bar top with a bung starter. Silver Dick Porter stood behind him, a sly, contemptuous amusement showing in his face. Seiller hung back in the crowd, watching Porter and keeping inconspicuous as he scanned the saloon. A tall, horsey blonde mounted to the bar top to the accompaniment of loud cheers. She laughed aloud and pranced along the mahogany, swinging her hips, arms akimbo. Seiller looked away, deafening his ears to the jests and ribald comments that swelled apace with the bidding. The blonde stepped down. Mohagknot crossed to the curtained doorway. Seiller felt his breath freeze in his throat. It was she, Nancy, dragged from the curtained doorway by fat Fluff Mohagknot.

Her eyes were stark blue against the pallor of her face as Mohagknot swung her up atop the bar. Hundreds of eyes caught the panic that gripped her. The crowd stilled, touched by a shame. All boisterousness died away.

"Now here's a likely little orphan," Fluff Mohagknot began. "A good cook, a—"

"What you trying to pull here, Mohagknot?" a voice yelled angrily. "This girl ain't no chippy."

OTHER VOICES took it up as men, made reckless by liquor, ranted at Mohagknot. The fat man slammed his bung starter against the bar.

"I brought her in," he yelled. "She ain't got no home, no folks. She was starvin' when I found her. I bought her food and clothes. Now I'm selling her." The fat man scowled, daring any man or group of men to argue the deal further.

"Three ounces of dust," a man said. "It's to send her to the States, I'm bidding!"

"Four!" Same reason!" another voice cut in.

"Five," Art Seiller said.

"Six—"

The bidding grew heated, and Seiller shoved forward, yelling to make himself heard, forgetting Porter and his hired killers in his eagerness. Eleven ounces. Twelve and a half!

He noticed suddenly that her eyes were fixed upon him with unwavering intensity. Mohagknot, too, was watching him, and Silver Dick Porter; and he saw that he had pushed himself forward until he stood almost at the woman's feet.

Men scrambled away from him as Porter said, "Well, it's Art Seiller again."

The saloon-man made a motion with his hand. From the edge of his eye, Seiller saw two men move over to stand beside the door.

Porter's lips twisted mockingly and he said, "One thousand dollars—and it's not to send her anywhere."

The crowd of miners shifted uneasily. Silver Dick Porter's face showed his triumph as he taunted the upper Menisso creek man.

"Fifteen hundred," Seiller said steadily.

Porter scowled as a few men cheered. "Two thousand!" His tones were clipped, icy with warning.

Tension strained in the hushed, watchful Silver Queen Saloon. Art Seiller gripped the Colt .44 in his mackinaw pocket. He hadn't the dust to beat Porter's bid. A trickle of perspiration edged the side of his face. Silver Dick Porter laughed mockingly.

"I'll add quit-claim deed to my claim," Seiller said.

Mohagknot's bung-starter smashed the bar top with deafening violence. "Sold! Sold!"

The grin vanished from Porter's face. "You ain't got a claim, Seiller! You ain't got nothing! I'm taking over all of upper Menisso tomorrow and you'll be too dead to argue!"

Mohagknot's big shoulders squared. "You ain't takin' my claim, Porter," he snarled. "I've an interest in upper Menisso now and I'm warning you—keep out!"

Porter squalled like a cat as Mohagknot turned against him. The saloonman leaped toward Seiller, dragging a gun from under his fancy vest. Art Seiller half ducked, triggering the Colt in his hand. He shot through the coat pocket, not taking time to

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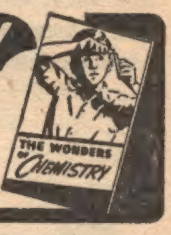

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pull the gun clear.

Gunfire smashed and echoed through the packed saloon as Seiller fired twice more. Porter stopped. For a long moment he hung upright on his toes. Then he crumpled, and the saloon was a bedlam of sound. Miners threw themselves toward the floor, scuttling for cover. Mohagknot flung the bung starter aside and pawed a long barrel six-gun from under the bar. He snapped a quick shot at Seiller, then moved over for a clearer shot. Seiller twisted, trying to free his little .44. Fluff Mohagknot laughed as he lined his six-gun.

The woman acted then. She kicked out, her slipper slamming into the side of Mohagknot's fat face and staggering him. His shot missed. Old Jersey Meadows and four upper Menisso men crowded in through the front door. The oldster's rifle blared. Mohagknot shuddered. Slowly, almost gently, he lowered his six-gun to the bar top. He reached up and placed his fingers against the darkening splotch on his wide chest. Then he folded over and slid down behind the bar. Other upper Menisso men crowded in, rifles ready. But with the deaths of Porter and fat Fluff Mohagknot, none of the Porter crew made a move.

Art Seiller lifted his arms to help the woman down from the bar. "I haven't anything but a rough cabin, Nancy," he said. "Maybe I can get you a safe passage to the States if that's where you want to go."

She stared at him, measuring him. Once, fleetingly, she glanced at the crowd, at the hot layers of tobacco smoke that fogged the room.

"Where ever you go," she said softly. "There's my home—if you want me."

The wild confusion within the saloon buried his answer, but she knew its meaning by the glow in his eyes. She leaned toward him.

"Drink up, boy," old Jersey Meadows crowed. "Tonight we're celebrating."

Sheiller shook his head. "I'll *be* celebrating," he promised happily.

Old Jersey Meadows noticed the woman then and his jaw dropped. Seiller was gone before he could find anything to say.

It was a riotous celebration.

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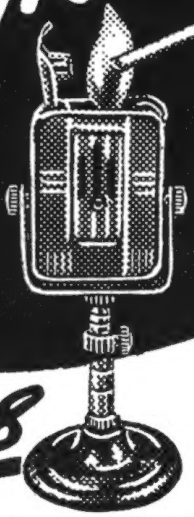

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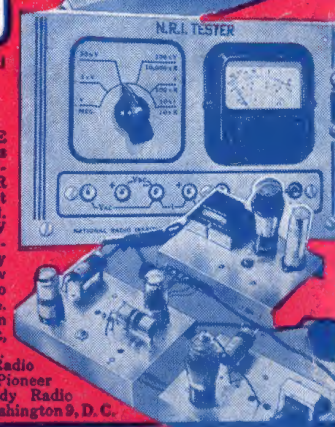

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